

Le Minotaur



Volume Five

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Le Minotaur

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Le Minotaur Magazine: Volume Five

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Cover picture: Suppression, by Vicki Ray.

If you have a submission for the **Le Minotaur** feel free to contact the magazine. The Editor in Chief of *Le Minotaur* can be contacted at

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“Adam and Eve needed no bed in the Garden of Eden. It's a lot easier to get in the family way than out of it, Daffodil, as you ought to realize. Yes,” ma tante said darkly, “one minute's pleasure, nine months'—”

Daffodil by Cecil Barr

Le Minotaur Magazine

Le Minotaur Press of Vancouver is delighted to publish the fifth edition of ***Le Minotaur*** Magazine which serves to explore the beast in all of us.

In this edition there are several new art submissions, poems and short stories that explore the beastliness of artistry and artists. We have several new contributors to our magazine – welcome! We also have vintage pieces. Special Thanks to Olivia and her Succubus paintings!

Please feel free to submit your short stories, prose, poetry and artwork to

penny_plenty321 @ yahoo.com

There is no fee to submit. There is no writer's fee provided by the journal for those who submit. The publishing rights remain with the author.

Le Minotaur welcomes submissions on a quarterly basis.

Succubus Paintings by Olivia Tasaka

Artist's Statement

I create art first and foremost as an emotional outlet. The beings and creatures present in my work, sometimes human and sometimes not, are often personifications of a feeling or inspired by my daydreaming. I am somewhat of a maximalist in my artwork and aim to create a canvas that is a unified piece, yet full of hidden details and drawings hidden under layers of paint.

My interest in art started the moment that I could hold a pencil, and from then on I was drawing in the margins of every notebook I owned and experimenting with different mediums whenever I could. I only truly discovered painting about a year ago, and I fell in love with the bright, bold colours and almost infinite layers that acrylic paints provide. I realized that I could create my own world on a blank canvas in a way that didn't feel possible with any other medium. Today, I would describe my art style as being playful and colourful, yet also tinged with darkness. I aim to toe the line between beautiful and grotesque, creating works that can feel both magical and unnerving at the same time.

Olivia Tasaka

Vancouver April, 2021



4 Breadsticks 99 Cheese



Eeb



I Wanna Meet MegaGod



Romantic Gateway to Mars



Happiness ...

Making a Minotaur's Mask

Needed Supplies

Paper to trace out patterns

Pencil and ruler

Circular object to trace out eyes

Second Hand Cardboard

Hobby knife and scissors

Glue Gun and two dozen glue sticks

Old beach towel

Square of foam (inside)

Brown cloth

Brown paint (in a can)

Gold Paint

Costs of materials: Under \$ 20 US











Call for Minotaur Art

Le Minotaur Magazine invites our readers to send in their original Minotaur Art, to be featured on the cover or within our Magazine.



***Minotaur in Love* by Anyuta Gusakova**

Five Poems by Stephanie Cui

Dawn

Out in the moonlight
The trees are glowing white.
They are fully dressed and await the wind's call.

But the wind is a shy girl at four in the morning,
And she does not come out to play.
Dawn slowly tip-toes, blueing the sky.
I am lost on a path so familiar.

Does darkness lock up my eyelids
With a key that only belongs to dawn?
I sneak by buildings,
They seem unrealistic against the early light.
Windows lit here and there, like the fading stars.

My footsteps are shaky,
My voice –the only echo remaining in the world.
The sun rows the moon across the sky, claiming its throne.
And I step into the day drunk with awe.

Two Strangers

~ a palindrome poem

Two strangers
Returning to
Their respective homes
Both leaving for
The train that departs at dawn
Boarding amidst the morning fog
To another ordinary day
Through the long and weary journey
Both remain silent
Rather than talking to each other
They put on music in their earbuds
Until the twentieth day
After smiles and formal greetings
They resolve to small talks
Something is starting to change
They discover their similarities and many differences
Revealing their strengths and weaknesses
Wary of the future and afraid of moving forward
Suffocated by the fear of being alone
Day after day
They sit next to each other
Dozing off on each others' shoulders
On the late-night train
Sharing sorrow and joy

And they whisper secrets
They pour their souls out
And they learn to trust
Placing each other above themselves
Grateful that they are
Boarding the same train
Two strangers who happened to be
At the right place
At the right time
A love story
Now begins ...

Spaceship

The sun peeks through the branches
as I walk down the shallow steps of the forest trail.
I hide my sandals in the tree trunk's shadow,
going barefoot, my skin burns against the golden sand.

I trace around the ruins of the castles
like the last soldier on guard in her homeland.
My eyes sparkle when I see the ocean at its full length.

The sky is a cloudy lens
between the ocean and the universe.
I think of the routine of waves, their silver edges,
of starfish on the rocks by the shore,

and of meteors' tails catching fire.
I connect the dots of stars to form an island.

A ship slowly dissolves into the light,
and emerges out of the planet Earth.
I count for the spaceship to take off.

Pieces of Time

I opened my silver pocket watch, it ticks like
A girl's high-heels down a school hallway.

The watch is a delicate piece of art, inside and out:
A tiny train on its face brings me back to a moment
In my dream.

I dream that I'm at a train station,
Hidden in the crowd,
I am alone.

I recognize no one, they pass by so fast,
They hardly notice me.

The sky's at its most beautiful stage,
When it will
But not yet darken.

I climb to the highest point of the world,
And people become raindrops
Dissolve into the moving waves below.

I wave frantically, I yell,
My hands are too shaky to grab their attention.
I wish for someone to comfort me.

But no,
People are catching trains to their dreams,
Caught up on journeys to Wonderland.

Time crawls down and kisses my palms lightly,
There I realize her lips have gone still.

I am running in a field with open arms

I am running in a field on my bare feet
The paddies all bend their heads
still green and raw
Autumn is months apart
I cannot wait for the golden waves to roar
and I don't want to fall
(unless you're there to catch me)

I am running in a field with my flowing hair

was it the wind or
is my head under water?
From each curl there dangles a star
Jewels I picked out just for my feathers
A beautiful creature like Medusa
(I will dazzle you with my glare)

I am running in a field with open arms
The sun went down for me long ago
In my last letter I confessed to her
how I dream of
Sunset forever
she granted me this wish because
(I turned myself into a shooting star)

I am running in a field beneath the purple sky
your reflection in my eyes
waltzing with the flowers
I think I'm running towards thin air
Is this how to disappear?
A piece of the world will fit into my arms
(and bestill the rumbling of my heart)

Cinnamon and Orange by Allison Quiller

Jill's eyes kept drifting back to the address scribbled on the sticky note on her dashboard. "202 Paintbrush Avenue." The name echoed in her head as she drove down the cracked residential street. The oak trees were ripe with autumn color, the reds and oranges vibrant in the misty day.

Two-oh-two Paintbrush Avenue, 202 Paintbrush Avenue.

The day before, Dr. Moore had handed back the term papers from Jill's Advanced Psychology class. "Protest, Despair, and Detachment: A Study of Grief by Jill Newmeyer." There was no grade, only the note and the address.

There. A two story maroon Victorian with a full garden and widow's walk.

Jill pulled into the driveway and checked herself in the mirror. Mousy. That's the only way she had ever been described, but whether it was because of her looks or because of the pinched and nervous expression around her mouth, she never knew.

She summoned up her courage, gathered her things and walked down the flagstones to the front porch. Red vines curled around the railings and several empty birdcages rocked in the breeze above the porch. The garden was rich, colorful, blooming. Jill glanced up at the tall house. Upstairs, a curtain swung shut.

What could Dr. Moore want with her? She wasn't the best in her class, but she wasn't the worst, either. Her work was always tidy and on time. She never complained or interrupted class. Jill kept to herself.

Her heels clicked, hollow as she ascended the steps. She stopped before the peeling front door, straightened her skirt and her glasses. Before she could reach for the bell, the door opened.

Dr. Moore's eyes behind her small round glasses were the first thing Jill could see. Then came her wide smile as she stepped out of the doorway. Her clothes billowed, and her grey hair spiraled past her shoulders. Several scarves hung around her neck in a spectrum of color.

Jill contorted her lips into an unfamiliar smile. As Dr. Moore shut the door behind her, a slight, sweet smell swept onto the porch. It reminded Jill of the holidays.

"Jill Newmeyer. My dear." The doctor beamed. Her teeth were very white, almost a transparent blue.

"Dr. Moore."

"We aren't in the classroom. Please, call me Ellora."

"Ellora."

“I have tea for us, but the water is still boiling. Let us sit outside for a bit. It's an appropriate day for that sort of thing, don't you think?”

“Oh, sure. That's fine.” Ellora ushered Jill over to the porch swing and sat in an eddy of flowing material. Jill lowered herself beside her.

The doctor sighed. “I am completely enamored with days like this. There is something romantic about it.”

“I suppose.”

There was a brief silence then. Ellora's eyes closed as she breathed in the cool air while Jill sat straight, her fingers toying in her lap.

“Um...” Jill ventured. Ellora's eyes opened. “I brought the copy of my term paper.” Jill started to rummage in her bag before Ellora's rich laugh cut her off.

“I'm sorry,” Jill stammered.

“Your paper is impeccable, dear. You approached the subject with a certain freshness that I haven't seen in years. But that's not why I asked you here.”

“Excuse me?”

Ellora stood and walked over to the railing. "I'm afraid I let my garden go this summer."

Jill looked more closely at the garden. Weeds grew through the blooms, and the flowers bent their heads towards the soil. A mouse lay stiff beneath a rosebush.

"I must have been confused," said Jill, "I thought you wanted..." She trailed off. She didn't know what she thought Dr. Moore had wanted.

"My dahlias are wilting." Ellora turned back to Jill. "I took a liking to you well before your term paper." She shook her head. "I'm a bit embarrassed why I brought you over. I would like you to meet my son."

The sound of a whistle pierced the air, making Jill jump. "That will be the tea," Ellora said. Jill looked again at the mouse beneath the rosebush. A few feet away there was another, on its back. And by the dahlias, there were two, facing each other, their tails curled around their noses.

"Are you coming, dear?" Ellora asked.

"Yes."

Ten minutes later, Jill sat in Dr. Moore's cramped library, her hands cupped around a mug of tea. The room was warm and windowless. Dr. Moore had a photo album open to pictures of her son, Silus. He was dark and thin, and even

as a child there were few photos of him smiling. He was handsome, though, so Jill continued to humour Dr. Moore.

“Who's that?” Jill said, pointing to a tall man standing beside the sad-eyed boy.

“My late husband,” Dr. Moore said, and her eyes lingered on the photo a moment before she flipped to the next page. “I hope you like your tea. Cinnamon and Orange, Silus's favorite.”

Jill smiled weakly and nodded. Inside the house, the sweet smell that had reminded her of the holidays was thick and oppressive. Underneath it there was something else.

“Where is Silus now?” she asked.

“Just upstairs, dear. You'll meet him in a moment.”

“He's here?”

Ellora nodded and flipped to the next page of the photo album. “You'll meet him in a moment.”

Jill stood up and shook her head. She wished there were windows, or at least a picture. Books pressed down on her from all sides.

Dr. Moore took her glasses off and smiled. “You could have written your term paper about anything at all.”

“I think I need some fresh air,” Jill said.

“What made you choose grief?”

Jill sat again. Maybe if she sipped her tea. “It's... it's fascinating.”

“You're more than fascinated. You're familiar.”

“I lost my parents early on.”

“After my husband, I wasn't ready to let go of Silus. I didn't want to be alone.”

“I understand,” Jill said, although she did not. She put a hand to her forehead.

“I should probably get going.”

“Don't be silly. Come upstairs and meet my boy.”

“If it's only for a moment.”

Ellora put a hand on Jill's elbow and guided her from her chair.

They came to a narrow stairway. Stiff, dark oil paintings covered the walls, shoved together in irregular patterns. Jill had to squint to see, and kept her hand on the wall to steady herself. The sweet smell was stronger now, and the odor underneath became more foul with each step.

Ellora opened the door at the top of the stairwell and motioned Jill inside. As Jill's eyes adjusted to the light, she suddenly placed the odor. The bloated body on the bed stared at her, disinterested.

It was dressed in a suit, it's arms lolling open as if to accept an embrace. Cinnamon sticks and dried orange peels littered the body and the bed like autumn leaves.

“Companionship is the key to happiness. You two will be spending much time together in the future.” She looked at Jill, still smiling. “How was that tea, dear?” Jill's fingertips began to tingle, and she heard her cup shatter on the floor. She backed toward the door, but she was already feeling light-headed.

Dr. Ellora Moore padded over to the bed, and stroked the body's hair. She looked lovingly into it's eyes, “This is the girl I was telling you about, Silus. Would you like some more tea?”

{First published in *This Great Society* in Sept. 2011}

Pictorial: OMG!



Surrealist and Dada Poetry

What is Poetry by the Surrealist Paul Eluard



Poetry is not necessarily limited by the secret ideas you have about it. But like the dreams one does not tell, it is apt to cause lapses of memory and to prevent the regular formation of a world superior to that in which forgetfulness

is used for the self-preservation of the individual.

That inspiration may leap freely from the mirror, all reflections of the personality must be effaced. Give influences free play, invent what has already been invented, what is beyond doubt, what is unbelievable, give spontaneity its pure value. Be the man who is questioned and who is heard. A single vision, infinitely varied.

THE POET IS HE WHO INSPIRES FAR MORE THAN HE WHO IS INSPIRED.

1936

A Dadaist Poem by A Nony Mouse

A Flower Tender Is Love Like

Sullen like up smothered;
Mortal and beckons arrived in us
love something angels;
Echo sun is someone ...
love sometimes beauty to sins;
Always soft ... soft of touch.
And our chocolate
but think of champagne and
That crushed dust quietly;
Is majestic;
A truths.
Strawberries awaits waiting
behind longing dear – and cinnamon.
It climb; Warmth to;
The morning for that words
it is the happiness timeless.
Sometimes within.
Fragrant is and are;
About sits and covered and ...
in about flower warm true to things has.
Vanilla sublime to tower;
Are tender as and speak godly pink it and;

Heaven flowers.
When a.
Dark love;
Their like;
Flower about.
The leave hazelnuts it;
Deep pixie.
Spoke a soul that;

{ You may recognize this poem in its previous incarnation ... }

Dada Poems by Harry Crosby

INVOCATION TO THE MAD QUEEN

I would you were the hollow ship
fashioned to bear the cargo of my love
the unrelenting glove
hurled in defiance at our blackest world
or that great banner mad unfurled
the poet plants upon the hill of time
or else amphora for the gold of life
liquid and naked as a virgin wife.

Yourself the Prize
I gird with Fire

The Great White Ruin
Of my Desire.

I burn to gold
fierce and unerring as a conquering sword
I bum to gold
fierce and undaunted as a lion lord
seeking your Bed
and leave to them the
burning of the dead.

ENQUETE TUMULTS AND CHANCES

Why do you prefer to live outside America ?
I prefer to live outside America
because in America the Stars were all suffocated
inside
because I do not wish to devote myself to perpetual
hypocrisy
because outside America there is nothing to
remind me of my childhood
because I prefer perihelion to aphelion
because I love flagons of wine
because I am an enemy of society and here I can
hunt with other enemies of society
because I want to be in at the death (of Europe)

because I like tumults and chances better than
security
because I prefer transitional orgasms to atlantic
monthlies
because I am not coprophagous
because I would rather be an eagle gathering
sun than a spider gathering poison
because by living outside of America New York
can still remain for me the City of a Thousand
and One Nights
because the Rivers of Suicide are more inviting
than the Prairies of Prosperity
because I prefer Mad Queens to Mild Virgins

SUNSTROKE

each Color changed her dress
and notions difficult to dream
(when pencils play their
parts preponderous)
tanged Sunward
with ladies preferring
their breasts
no yeast suggests the
ruffled tenor of the
dragoman

who wishes on the hay
one last encounter
irrelevant of pause
(why change her drawers
to make the rhyme
less difficult to see)
the soot on ivory carpets
mongol-colored in the brain
the bitter rain
beyond the destination
of the heart
beyond the destination
of the brain
beyond the destination
of the brain
the sleeping goat-bugs
know not any avatar
and where the Russian
orifice is samovar
there Red Sea Rimbaud
guards his Aden Caravan
and Verlaine trembles
to the touch of trains
 it rains
 it rains
to mourn the ocean giants

buried deep
among the rankled seaweed
sharp with frost (aerial)
here buttercups shall
robin out the thread
that led beyond the
furcoat pleasures of a night
here gopher lights
shall fall and crawl
from one small suitcab
built for two
and now the shell holes
dwindle into fences
white as cherry lit with
snow
or carcassonnèd in
strength unyoked to
ivory plants that
turquoise airily to sea
(the waves are paper
bags to burst)
up that great Step to Sun
(zythum to aardvark
and back again)
here xebecs tell of toadstools
tabled out in pride

here xebecs tell of one lost bride
whose solaced eyes once
wept
to see the bursting parasols
migrate
between the two necessities of life
(and if her tossing hair
should catch
upon an edge of cloud)
and hearts in fear inured
murmur her name
and dream sharp arrows
squeezed to stick upon
the Targe of Sun
or play at proposition
with the maid who gilly-gillies to the
S of mountain
railroad tracks
or rides astride their backs
voluptual as books in June
and in my bed
the Mad Queen lies
the Mad Queen of the bedroom eyes
the Idol I idolatrize
Color explodes
where once the feet of

Tripod Time danced wantonly
to bugle notes
(of unremembered telephones)
queer Goya tailcoats
sneezing into soot
queer rabbits falling
from the Flagpole of the year
and breasts spurt flowers
cramoisy and dark
and nestling turtledoves
are seen through fog
beyond the crow-black roads
Color Explodes
and if a proper noun
invigorates our teeth
can we not say
Black Black
I wake to Sun!

IN MADNESS

not in calm weather
faint breezes calm summer
when clouds have fled from the sky
and she lies with her hair and her dress undone
asleep in the hay in the sun

frail as a feather
I say not in this weather
but when the trees are bare
when the wind roars
when it whirls up the grass
 on the ground
when it drives the rain forward
when the sound of the thunder
 and slamming of doors
warns of mad weather
I say in this weather
(black out of doors
black meadows
black raindrops
black weather)
in this weather
when the storm is howling across the sky
then shall the Mad Queen fly to her love
proud as a feather
proud as sun
their hearts mad beating
 in unison

Surreal Poems by Paul Eluard

Like an Image (Fragment)

Armour of prey the black perfume shines
Trees wear an almond landscape hair
Cradle of ail the landscapes the keys the dice
The plains of care and mountains of alabaster
The lamps of the suburbs, bashfulness, storms
Unforeseen gestures devoted to fire
The paths separating the sea from its drowned
Ail the undecipherable riddles.

The thistle flower builds a castle
It climbs the ladder of the wind
And death's head seeds
Ebony stars on the glistening panes
Promise ail to their lovers
The others who pretend
Maintain the leaden order.

Silent misery man
His early morning face
Opens like a prison
His eyes are heads cut off
His Angers serve to count

To measure to take to convince
His Angers know how to bind him.

Ruin of the public
Its emotion is in tatters
Its enthusiasm damped
The ornaments suspended to the terrors of thunder
Livid pastures where rocks leap out
To put an end to it
A tomb adorned with the prettiest trinkets
A silken veil over the langour of lust
To put an end to it
With a single blow of an axe in the back.

In the ravines of sleep
Silence rears its children
Here is the fatal sound that burst the ear-drums
The dusty death of colours
Idiocy
Here is the first idler
And the unconscious movements of insomnia
The ear the reeds to curve back like a helmet
The exacting ear the enemy forgotten in the mist
And the inexhaustible silence
Which overthrows nature by not naming it
Which sets up smiling snares

Or frightening absences
Breaks ail the mirrors of the lips.

On the open sea in delicate arms
On fine days the waves in full sail
And the blood leads to everything
It is a square without a statue
Without rowers without a black flag
A rainbow-coloured naked square
Where ail the wandering flowers
Flowers at the mercy of the light
Have concealed fairylands of daring
It is a jewel of indifference
Within the scope of every heart
The chiseled jewel of laughter
It is a mysterious house
Where children baffle men

On the outskirts of hope
To no purpose
Calm creates a vacuum.

Les Gertrude Hoffman Girls

Gertrude, Dorothy, Mary, Claire, Alberta,
Charlotte, Dorothy, Ruth, Catherine, Emma,

Louisa, Margaret, Ferrai, Harriet, Sarah,
Florence in the nude, Margaret, Toots and Thelma.

Beauties of night, beauties of fire and beauties of rain,
The trembling heart, the hidden hand and windlike eyes,
You show me the movements of light,
You exchange a glance for a springtime.

The girth of your waist for a flower's circuit,
Boldness and danger for your unsullied flesh,
You exchange love for the shivers of steel.
And the unconscious laugh for dawn's promises.

Your dances are the fearful whirlpool of my dreams
And I fall and my downfall perpetuates my life
The space beneath your feet is increasingly vast,
Wonders, you dance upon the springs of the day.

All the Rights

Simulate

The flowered shadow of flowers hung from spring
The shortest day of the year and the esqimau night
The agony of autumnal visionaries
The odour of roses the wise stinging of nettles
Stretch transparent linen

Into the clearing of your eyes
Display the ravages of fire its works of inspiration
And the paradise of its ash
The abstract phenomenon struggling with the clock's hands
The wounds of truth the oaths that cannot fold
Display yourself

You can go out in crystal robes
Your beauty goes on and on
Your eyes shed tears caresses smiles
Your eyes have no secrets
And are limitless.

You Are Everywhere

You rise up and the water opens out
You lie down and the water spreads

You are the water turned away from its abysses
You are the earth that takes root

And upon which ail things assume a form
You blow bubbles of silence in the wilderness of noise

You play nocturnal hymns upon the rainbow's strings
You are everywhere and abolish ail pathways

You sacrifice time
To the perennial youth of the rigorous flame
That veils nature by reproducing it

O woman you give birth to a body always the same

Your own

You are its very likeness.

Necessity

Without great ceremony on earth
Near those who keep their poise
On this misery of ail repose
Right near the good way
In the dust of the serious
I establish relations between man and woman
Between the smeltings of the sun and the bag of bees
Between the enchanted grottoes and the avalanche
Between the care-rimmed eyes and the pealing laughter
Between the heraldic blackbird and the star of garlic
Between the leaden thread and the sound of the wind
Between the fountain of ants and the growing of strawberries
Between the chalcedony and winter in pins

Between the eye-ball tree and the recorded mimicry
Between the carotid and the ghost of salt
Between the auracaria and the head of a dwarf
Between the branching rails and the speckled dove
Between man and woman
Between my solitude and you.

Cradled Pamphlet by Salvador Dali

Perduring pamphlet
unjustly refusing
a cup
any portuguese cup
that is made nowadays
in a plate factory
because a cup
resembles by its shape
a gentle municipal arab antimony
set up at the reaches of the neighbourhood
like the glance of my lovely Gala
the glance of my lovely Gala
smell of a morning band
like the epithelial tissue of my lovely Gala
her clownish lamplighter's epithelial tissue
yes I will repeat it a thousand times
Perduring pamphlet

unjustly refusing
a cup
any portuguese cup
that is made nowadays
in a plate factory
because a cup
resembles by its shape
a gentle municipal arab antimony
set up at the reaches of the neighbourhood
like the glance of my lovely Gala
the glance of my lovely Gala
smell of a morning band
like the epithelial tissue of my lovely Gala
her clownish lamplighter's epithelial tissue

The Very Image by Rene Magritte

An image of my grandmother
her head appearing upside-down upon a cloud
the cloud transfixed on the steeple
of a deserted railway-station
far away

An image of an aqueduct
with a dead crow hanging from the first arch
a modern-style chair from the second
a fir-tree lodged in the third

and the whole scene sprinkled with snow
An image of the piano-tuner
with a basket of prawns on his shoulder
and a firescreen under his arm
his moustache made of clay-clotted twigs
and his cheeks daubed with wine
An image of an aeroplane
the propellor is rashers of bacon
the wings are of reinforced lard
the tail is made of paper-clips
the pilot is a wasp
An image of the painter
with his left hand in a bucket
and his right hand stroking a cat
as he lies in bed
with a stone beneath his head
And all these images
and many others
are arranged like waxworks
in model bird-cages
about six inches high.

Two Poems by Andre Breton

Postman Cheval

We are the birds always charmed by you from the top of these belvederes
And that each night form a blossoming branch between your shoulders
and the arms of your well beloved wheel-barrow
Which we tear out swifter than sparks at your wrist
We are the sighs of the glass statue that raises itself on its elbow when
man sleeps
And shining holes appear in his bed
Holes through which stags with coral antlers can be seen in a glade
And naked women at the bottom of a mine
You remembered then you got up you got out of the train
Without glancing at the locomotive attacked by immense barometric
roots
Complaining about its murdered boilers in the virgin forest
Its funnels smoking jacinths and moulting blue snakes
Then we went on, plants subject to metamorphosis
Each night making signs that man may understand
While his house collapses and he stands amazed before the singular
packing-cases
Sought after by his bed with the corridor and the staircase
The staircase goes on without end
It leads to a millstone door it enlarges suddenly in a public square
It is made of the backs of swans with a spreading wing for banisters
It turns inside out as though it were going to bite itself
But no, it is content at the sound of our feet to open ail its steps like
drawers
Drawers of bread drawers of wine drawers of soap drawers of ice drawers

of stairs
Drawers of flesh with handsfull of hair
Without turning round you seized the trowel with which breasts are
made
We smiled at you you held us round the waist
And we took up the positions of your pleasure
Motionless under our lids for ever as woman delights to see man
After having made love.

Revolving Lights

The russet toga that collects the lozenge stars
Hurts at a touch but the charming funeral
Which the birds follow has hardly taken place
Before I go from depth to depth

From the first this is the best of reed-pipe tunes
It re-sheaths its sword in the sand-banks of hearts
Then the burning candie in the heights
Of my room copulates with the lictor's axe

Likewise there are sins replaced
The viper eyes the breasts of the young woman
He only has truly bared them to the world
Breaking away from the air the rose's thorn

Then the abandoned pedestal of a minstrel's bust
Falls a victim to butterflies and their followers
The great rockets of sap beneath the public-parks
And the moss that grows over my desk as I sleep

In an office the American punch was wonderful
Not every day do we bathe in our own blood
The ear calculates the days the pretty trade-marks
The sea-gull on the white horse's back

These are cavalry attacks upon the right
Eternally rebellious Of the shudders of spears
Is made the angel who âges in terrible virginity
Like electric light in the trees

The drum the drum for ever muffled
A fairy gorse sweeps the diamonds off her dress
The story of the grinding of a seed more bland than coffee
When I hold you on the battlements in the great mystery

Daffodil by Cecil Barr

{ excerpt from *Daffodil*, 1932. Later published as *French Model* in the 1950's }

1. The Virgin

DAFFODIL! How old are you?”

With some curiosity I glanced across our frugally laid table at my dear adoptive aunt. Surely she knew my age at least as well as I!

“Nineteen, ma tante, nearly twenty.”

“Twenty! Good God, twenty!” For a moment she hesitated, her teeth toying with chop. Then she asked me to pass the salt, fixing me with her round, frozen-blue eyes, her fine full-breasted figure bent slightly forward. I passed her the salt. She hummed and hawed. Evidently she was finding difficulty in telling me whatever was on her mind. What could it be?

“Daffodil!”

“Ma tante, darling?”

“What do you—know?”

“What do I know?” I repeated dreamily. “The Chinese philosopher said: those who know do not tell: those who tell do not know.”

“Stop that!” ma tante said smartly. “Don't show off to me. What I'm asking is what you know about the facts of life—”

“What every young girl ought to know.”

“Now take sex, Daffodil.”

“I'm against it.”

Ma tante pished. She didn't approve of flippancy on that holy subject.

“What do you mean, against it? Wait a minute while the girl brings the cheese.”

“It's too hot for cheese, ma tante.”

“I'll have my bit of cheese, hot or not hot”

“I'm an impregnable fortress, ma tante; you're wasting your time.”

“Yes. Well, I'm sure I don't like these conversations. They're from a sense of duty, Daffodil, not a dirty mind. When was the last time we talked about such

things? When you were thirteen, and you had to be told? And if there's anything you want to know now, ask me, and I'll tell you if I can.”

But in theory, anyhow, there was nothing ma tante could teach me.

Lunch was over and I began to think of going to my work. But ma tante was not yet done with me.

“Next year you'll be twenty-one,” she said with melancholy, “and you can say adieu to me if you want to; you'll be your own mistress—”

“But, darling!” I cried aghast, “you don't think I'd ever for a moment dream of parting from you. We're as one, and indivisible as the Siamese twins, forever and ever, till death us do part. What should I do without you?”

Her round blue eyes unfroze, and I, too, felt for a horrid moment as if all this might end in tears. What was the matter with us? The cheese, the heat?

“You might get married, Daffodil.”

“What a masochist you are, darling.”

“Don't you call me names, miss! And that Brian—” I sighed. “You know that we're just partners in a studio, we share the expenses of models—”

“What else do you share?”

“Nothing,” I snapped. “You must really try to believe that nowadays a girl can be on friendly terms with a man and not necessarily be his bed fellow. And as for marriage, even if I wanted to get married, can you see the son of the Bishop of Spinchester marrying me, a penniless foundling?”

I got up and collected my hat. I really must be going.

“Rubbish!” ma tante exclaimed. “With your coloring and your figure you could marry the Bishop himself.”

It was terribly hot in our little dining-room, and I suddenly saw that ma tante was looking tired, worn, almost her age.

“Darling, you're run down; you want a change. Why don't you go away?”

She started, glancing at me curiously.

“Well, I never! Fancy you saying that! As it happened, I did get a letter this morning....”

Uncanny how often two females living together in close intimacy guess each other's most private thoughts. Perhaps ma tante had not herself suspected it, but all this talk had been leading up to the suggestion that she dash over to England for a week or so, to stay with the sister, Annie, whose husband had the milk route. A good boy (aged fifty-eight); he'd never given Annie a

moment's anxiety. There was something respectable about them too, that would be soothing after the years on the Continent. Ma tante was far from being narrow-minded, but all the same, this Paris life, artists, and so on....

“But how'll you do alone, Daffodil? And whatever sort of mischief will you be getting into?”

“That's my trouble about you, darling.” I put my arms around her neck and kissed her suddenly under the ear, where it always made her squeak. “How do I know you are not going to put ideas into Edwin's head, and then what will Annie have to say about it?”

Ma tante purred but protested.

“No, I'm too old, Daffodil. I'm on the shelf. A few years ago, perhaps,—but not with the family. But I don't like leaving you, I really don't.”

“You can go, ma tante darling, if you promise to be good.”

But it wasn't settled so easily as that. Suppose I was up to my tricks? Tricks? I knew well enough what she meant.

“Ma tante darling, I've had nearly twenty years' practice at sleeping alone in a bed.”

“Adam and Eve needed no bed in the Garden of Eden. It's a lot easier to get in the family way than out of it, Daffodil, as you ought to realize. Yes,” ma tante said darkly, “one minute's pleasure, nine months'—”

“You know perfectly well I'm a pure girl, and intend to remain so. I can't help it if it sounds eccentric....”

“There may be something in it,” ma tante mused. “I daresay it'll come back to fashion sooner or later. Purity, I mean.”

“And that's where I shall score.”

“Well, it's one way of scoring. Going mistre, I call it. However, as long as you declare your suit, I suppose you're paid.”

“Chastity's the one original suit left worth playing. I shall play it—to win.”

“How you do talk, I'm sure,” ma tante said, with a touch of pettishness. She hated such words as chastity or virgin, preferred to convey them by meaningful silence or a roundabout phrase. “Very well, then, my dear, I'll go and start packing. But if you'll take my advice, you'll keep your eye on that young man. Parsons' sons are always the worst.”

“He's a bishop's son, ma tante. There's a subtle difference.”

“Horsefeathers!” said ma tante, or words to that effect.

2. The Left Bank

“AHH, merde! I have the feet full of ants!”

Lolette, the model, rolled her eyes and her body trembled impatiently. It was so hot in the studio that I envied her her nakedness, and wondered if Brian, dressed in a shirt, a pair of worn grey trousers and espadrilles, was cooler than I. The wax model I was working on would not come right. Lolette, for all her academic beauty, was useless to me, and I knew that this figurine would never be cast in bronze and sold in the art departments of the great stores.

“Ah, merde!”

“Lolette,” I said severely, “do you realize that Monsieur is the son of a great church dignitary... a bishop?”

To be sure Brian had nothing of the church and nothing of the —dignitary about him,—and, if possible, even less of the artist; he looked (what he was) an excellent amateur footballer and had the regular, handsome, godlike features of those heroes of fiction who are continually and heartily exchanging spots of beer with their friends, and outwitting with ease incredibly ferocious and detestable villains. But even at nineteen I had discovered that a man's soul did not necessarily correspond to his physical appearance. Brian did not drink beer.

Lolette held the pose in spite of pins and needles. Such was discipline, and I admired her. Brian painted on, remorselessly.

“A bishop! If he were the son of an ant-eater, it would be more useful,” Lolette muttered between clenched teeth. Darling Brian, he painted so badly, too, and because of his charming personality none of his friends (and I least of all) dared tell him so. As for selling his pictures, that was beside the question, even geniuses starved; to starve is a prerogative of genius.

“Be a good lass, Lolette,” Brian said. “Hold the pose another couple of minutes, and then I’ve finished for the day.”

“So have I,” I said. “This isn’t the temperature to deal with wax.”

“Ah, merde! Two minutes, they can be as long as two hours.”

“Oh, very well.” Regretfully Brian broke away from his work and Lolette got down stiffly from her eminence. “Any good?” he grinned across at me.

“No good at all.” I didn’t want to crab our mutual model, for his sake, but Lolette was wasting my time. Patience. It would be my turn to choose the next.

“I’m sorry, Daffodil. What is it? The heat?”

“Perhaps.”

Lolette was meandering about the studio in her body, unstiffening her joints: Brian had no mercy; the word is unknown to that godlike type of man. Lolette's unstiffening was a long process, she had no qualms about displaying her person. Wasn't she a very clean model indeed? She wouldn't have missed her Saturday bath for nine francs ninety. To be sure today was Friday, and certain faint marks I observed were due to disappear on the morrow. She halted in front of Brian's canvas and sniffed. Poor Brian! But he did not seem to mind. And presently having stodged his eyes with his masterpiece he came across to me. My formless lump of wax conveyed nothing to him—there was nothing to convey. “It's five o'clock,” said Brian. “What about tea?” I arose and unlocked a cupboard and got out a bottle of port, a bottle of imitation (but potent) absinthe, a box of biscuits, and glasses. As if a bell had been rung steps sounded on the stairs. I got out more glasses. Our studio was very chic, it had its own private water tap. I let the water run long so that we might drink cold. Before I had finished my preparations the door opened, and three representative French artists entered. I breathed a small sigh of relief; after all, it might have been six or seven.

Our visitors grouped themselves about the room. Brian washed his hands at the tap, Lolette stretched her naked modesty in our chief ornament, a wicker easy-chair. I served drinks.

Vinel could paint, he was a genius, but was inclined to be unclean. Janigaud occasionally sold a picture which was a good thing, for he was married and had two children. He was quite dependable too. There is so much nonsense talked about artists. Vinel was the most painstaking and hard-working man I

have known. Janigaud was disgustingly respectable. His unique vice was luxuriousness. Fanotin was still tied to his mother's apron-strings, elastic though they might be; he was only a few months older than I.

Even Lolette had a husband whose bed she shared more often than not. He was a plumber. Hence perhaps the weekly bath.

Glasses securely in hand, the visitors gathered around Brian's canvas, praising it sedulously, both out of gratitude to their host and because if they didn't they could naturally expect no praise from him.

Brian was not deceived by their remarks. He smiled comfortably.

“Never mind. I can always end up as a pavement artist.”

“In Paris,” said Vinel, “pavement artists wear silk drawers.”

“Or none at all,” said Fanotin, with the kind of wit characteristic of his years. But I blushed. It had been so hot that morning—even when I was dressing, and visibility in the studio was—well, high. I pulled down my skirt as far as it would go.

After the picture, its original became the center of attraction. References were made to our Lolette's past, and prophecies were hazarded about her future. Lolette began to enjoy herself. This was the language she understood and she ably occupied their attention. Except Fanotin's. He came and sat on the floor

beside the very ancient rocking-chair upon which I had draped myself. He was a beautiful youth, the despair of his parents who idolized and spoiled their only child, and he grossly profited by their love. He was slight and effeminate in appearance, but he had iron wrists and bought his clothes from a London tailor. He wore a silk shirt and pale beige trousers and brown Bond Street shoes, and he was so clean and comely to behold that I was ashamed of our dusty floor. He took my hand and brushed it with his lips.

"Dear Daffodil, how beautiful you are today. The heat suits you; it gives you an appearance of languor, and your eyes are larger than ever. You have no right to such brown eyes with that daffodil hair—what is the word? Gossamer, as if each hair had been separately dipped in golden nectar. Do you know, Daffodil, do you know that you are the loveliest thing in Paris?"

"Dear Fanotin, it gives me such pleasure to listen to you."

"And when I hold your hand and look into your eyes as I am doing now, I cannot help dreaming, however painful it is for me, of a fairy's bedroom in some Mediterranean castle, and a balcony overlooking the sea. Moonlight, of course, one must have moonlight as nothing better has been invented. And you in my arms, you in your silver body and my naked arms about you. Oh, my adored Daffodil, I would kiss your lips and then your sweet breast and then—"

"You would awake from your delicious dream."

"—and then your lips again, and from being cold they would grow warmer and warmer and burning hot, and your teeth would part and—"

"You would awake from your delicious dream."

But I am afraid I may have been blushing again, he said it all so nicely, and he clasped my hand with urgent pressure, and moved round so that his head leaned against my knee.

"Daffodil, Daffodil darling, I have something to say to you, my sweet, something quite particular...."

"Does it concern a bed, a fairy's bed?"

"Intimately."

"Then, dear Fanotin, I'm afraid—"

"But you are so hard, Daffodil, so cruel. It isn't flower-like to be so cruel. And I who want to offer you the first fruits—"

"Oh, oh, first fruits! But who doesn't know that you were very nearly a father when you were sixteen, and it was only thanks to some clever friends that you weren't? Darling Fanotin, be probable." He frowned delightfully, a sheik painted on ivory.

"You're a dreadful creature, Daffodil, and no flower at all. Flowers permit one to finish one's sentences. I was about to say the first fruits of my soul."

"But there's nothing I would more happily accept than the first fruits of your soul."

"Transmitted uh—physically—" he appealed, and I have no doubt at all that he was not easy to refuse. Nevertheless I refused, gently and with suitable flattery. He sighed profoundly and in an excess of defeatism (assumed or otherwise) released my hand which I let fall gently, languorously, upon his head. His hair waved as it listed, and was most pleasant to the caress. Yes, he was the prettiest boy....

"Daffodil," he whispered, "I want to paint your portrait."

My laughter shattered our tenuous web of talk. "Fanotin, Fanotin, that's not worthy of you. At least you must first learn to paint. Why, at present I wouldn't allow you to paint my front door. You must think of a more tempting and a likelier lure."

"I can paint twenty times as well as that lump Brian," he sulked, "and what's more, I can give him a stroke a hole. Daffodil, why do you treat me so abominably? What is the matter with me? I'm young, I know, but so are you, and I'm sure you are not the sort of girl who stipulates gray hair in her lover. Look at Brian."

"Brian isn't my lover," I reminded him serenely. "I have no lovers, neither gray-haired nor dark-haired nor fair-haired; and I want no lovers."

"Narcissism," he fumed. "You are telling me that you are sufficient unto yourself"

The disgusting cuckoo-clock left by a previous tenant cuckooed seven times. Lolette went. Vinel borrowed a last cigarette. Janigaud shuddered slightly as his eyes once more fell on Brian's canvas. Fanotin leaned disconsolately against the door-post. Brian looked hungry. I yawned.

In a few moments we were alone.

"They're decent fellows," Brian offered handsomely, "if they are Frenchmen, and if they do think my painting's muck. What do you think of it, Daffodil?"

"I like it, you know, Brian dear. Of course we're all only learning—"

Brian grinned delightfully.

"Nothing further is necessary. I say, I'm most frightfully hungry. Come and split a steak with me somewhere."

But I explained that was impossible, I couldn't leave ma tante alone the last evening. As far as that was concerned, Brian countered, there was no reason I should put myself out for a silly old dowager of her kind.

"But, Brian, she's a darling. I adore her"

"Oh, I say, Daffodil, don't tell me-"

"But I do. She's the only person I love in the world."

"And Fanotin?" He glanced round at me impudently, and I chided him as he deserved. Fanotin indeed! I proposed that he should join ma tante and me; but he was doubtful.

"I don't think the old lady likes me so much."

"She won't if you treat her as an old lady. Yes, you had better come, Brian, if only to reassure her about us."

"About us? What about us? Oh, the silly old creature she must be! I see what you mean."

"She finds it hard to believe in a relationship so pure as ours."

"You're a damned pretty girl, of course," Brian admitted. "But well convince her easily enough if that's all that's the matter. Leave it to me, Daffodil. Now if I were a fellow like Fanotin."

"Can he really give you a stroke a hole?"

Brian looked deeply disgusted. "Is that what he said? He's certainly pretty hot; some of these Latins... I suppose he was making love to you all the time he was camping out on the floor by your rocking-chair?"

"Well, really, Brian dear, I suppose he was."

"He would be," said Brian.

I put on my hat and sighed, but inaudibly. "He does it remarkably well," I said.

3. Alone in Paris

With ma tante departed a certain sense of security. There was nothing specific, but a pretty girl, alone, in Paris, must in the nature of things have a perilous time of it if ever she has the misfortune to display the slightest weakness.

Yes, there was a subtle difference since her departure. Fanotin's eyes, automatically yearning, rested on me with a touch of possessiveness as if now it were only a question of time. And Brian became fraternal and protective.

On Sunday, he and I went alone together by train to a little town called lisle Adam, where there is a beach on the banks of the Oise, and we spent the day in the water. It was a joy to see Brian's beautiful athlete's body, his skin as white as mine, and I took the keenest professional interest in the movement of his muscles, the shape of his shoulders, the fall of his narrow hips and flat

thighs. I determined to use him for my next figurine and I memorized hard. But once or twice he caught my eyes fixed on him rather too intently perhaps for modesty, and there was a vaguely uncomfortable moment. I dared not tell him I was borrowing him, for he would never have consented to appear in bronze; he wasn't at all the kind of man who displays his body with pride and enjoys being photographed in indecent and revelatory trunks—wrongly revelatory; a man's body, is far more interesting than a woman's from the sculptor's point of view, but it can stand a *cache-sexe* even less.

We had a humble supper of beer and beef in a *brasserie* with music, and then Brian began to grow depressed. He was so poor, and his formidable father, the Bishop of Spinchester, C. Spinach, Brian disrespectfully called him, was so utterly disapproving of Brian's plunge into the world of art. For the first time he confided in me that when he broke away from the ecclesiastical home in which he had been brought up, he was himself well on the way for a parson. He was also an international rugby player. The muscular Christian business of which I had heard a great deal at school. ...

"But there you are," Brian said gloomily, "when it came to the point I discovered I had no vocation—that's the technical way of saying that I couldn't get the slightest kick out of the game or out of parsoning. C. Spinach was wild. The Church is a regular family pursuit of ours. But I couldn't stand it, the talky-talky to the old ladies and the bedroom eyes of the young ones. They can't resist a curate, I wonder why. Perhaps because the clergy are notoriously prolific and one must be prolific with something? Do you think that's the explanation, Daffodil?" He grinned at me naughtily.

"It's a very ingenious one," I murmured.

"Of course C. Spinach went off the deep end. Called it treachery, ingratitude, and threatened to cut me off with a round of toast. The old gentleman's a topper as long as one is of his way of thinking, but the moment one strikes out—ugh! So I sold a car I happened to possess, blackmailed Uncle George and came here to paint. I've made the money last until now, and taking you into partnership, Daffodil, has helped a lot, but I can see signs of the end. And then? Ignominious surrender? I must eat, with my appetite, whatever else happens, and. the sale of my pictures so far hasn't brought me in the price of a *croissant*."

Silently I agreed with him about his appetite, and wondered if I dare ask him a question that had always puzzled me. Brian was a darling but I honestly didn't think he would ever be able to paint, and I couldn't imagine anybody normal investing in a picture of his. I wasn't much good myself, but thanks to Slutsky —the cleverest dealer on the Left Bank—a market of sorts had been created for my figurines. Concierges liked to see them decorating their mantel-pieces, and professional ladies appeared to think that they added tone to their business premises.

Dozens of other people could have done the things as well if not better than I, but I had the ear of Slutsky. And I had always been as regular in my deliveries as a mid-Victorian mother, until Lolette. With Lolette I couldn't do anything

good. As for Brian! The picture he was now working on, a stooping nymph, in a kind of mauve-ish treatment, oh dear, it was a horror.

... "Tell me, Brian dear, how did you come to think of painting as a career?"

To my relief he treated it as quite a natural query.

"The first time it ever came into my mind was when I was twelve and won the drawing-prize at school. Of course I know that doesn't mean anything much necessarily, but I've always been keen on fooling about with a pencil and a paint brush and once even I subscribed to a correspondence course."

"Good heavens, Brian, you take art more seriously than I guessed."

"Strange as it may seem to you, Daffodil, those fellows had a great opinion of my work and they actually wrote to me to persuade me to carry on and take the advanced course. So there's obviously something in me, if I can only whip it out. And anyhow when the smash-up came I could think of nothing else to do."

He went on meditatively, "There's a comic old trout I know in Paris, who's in a sort of way a friend of the family, that is to say, she was a maid in my aunt's house and then she married this Wigsworth fellow who made a pile out of haddock or something and landed a knighthood. They live in Paris because they can swank more conveniently. Old Sally Wigsworth and I have always been great friends, she's a shocking snob, Lady Wigs-worth! Damn silly rot."

"Well, the point of all this is that Sally's setting up a fine new house near the Pare Monceau, and she could do with a picture that will go with the drawing-room. Hence the nymph. She's promised to pay me a fair price for it if I get it hung at the Salon."

"Oh, Brian!" I exclaimed. "My poor chick, don't you know it's hopelessly difficult to get into the autumn salon?"

"I know I haven't any influence," he said astonishingly, "but surely merit stands some sort of a chance in this world?"

Poor darling Brian, my soul wept for him, I thought of his mauve marvel and shivered. He didn't even do Lolette justice. I could have kissed him in a consolatory way, he was looking so tremendously handsome after his day in the open air. But I reminded myself that he wasn't aware he was in need of consolation.

I began to wonder whether Brian's feelings toward me were as cool as they appeared; as mine were for him, for instance. People are continually saying that love is a mere-byproduct of adjacency. Well, Brian and I had been adjacent enough in all conscience; for nearly a year we had seen each other practically every day, and generally in the presence of a naked woman or man. Models, I admit, but even so I must confess that from time to time certain precise comparisons flitted through my mind. Did they flit through Brian's? And if so, did they affect him as little as they seemed to affect me?

I didn't at all know how the minds of men like Brian work. Fanotin's mind was an open book—the kind of book that is sold "under the leg" in the Palais Royal; and I knew exactly how to deal with it. Brian seemed to be effortlessly pure in an utterly monkish way. I couldn't help asking myself how he ever disposed of his surplus vitality. He never so much as referred to anything of that kind concerning himself. He didn't treat me with respect, that would have been unbearably odious; what good is respect to a girl of nineteen? He treated me fraternally, yes, fraternally, and I supposed that was the most satisfactory state of affairs. What more should a sensible well-brought-up girl want or dream of? I am sure I neither wanted nor dreamed of anything more. And to spice all this wholesomeness there was always Fanotin, as unhealthily minded a little brat as had ever seduced a chambermaid.

Pictorial: Got My Number?



When Main Street Came to Montparnasse by Samuel Putnam

A bright sunny day in Montparnasse, bright between the unfailing Parisian showers. The terraces are crowded, with the exception of the *Rotonde*, which is deserted as usual. Things have been a bit dull of late, but, fortunately, it does not take much to provide entertainment. Conspicuously seated at the *Dome* is a gaunt-looking chap with a shock of reddish hair. He is obviously expecting that he will be noticed. I say obviously, for we have seen his kind before and know the symptoms. We are in the habit of calling this type, as distinguished from the ordinary summer tourist or vacationing college boy, the “big shot from home.” Now, there is a curious telepathy, a kind of grapevine, that operates between those terraces, and within a very short while every one on all three of them is aware that the visitor is none other than Sinclair, or “Red,” Lewis. At the same time, through a seemingly tacit and simultaneous understanding, all those at the *Dome* appear to be agreed that no notice whatsoever is to be taken of Mr. Lewis's presence.

It is the slap direct from the Joyce and Stein brigade to the literature that is being produced in their native land; it is their retort to Main Street and Babbitt and, as they see it, the stenographic, Pullman-smoker school of writing, which they do not consider writing at all. It would be hard to say how much, if any, of this Mr. Lewis gets; but, in any event, he very soon makes his exit, and as he does so his face is about the color of his hair. There is an unuttered snort as he stamps out, and a giggle, becoming a laugh, runs around the tables and spreads down the street to the *Coupo*le and across the way to the Select. It is

sufficient amusement for the next couple of hours, something to tell the latecomers about.

This incident, perhaps, may have had something to do with the violent feeling which Mr. Lewis later displayed toward the Parisian variety of American aesthete. At any rate, it brings out a characteristic attitude on the part of the “exiles.” Even Montparnasse and Greenwich Village did not mix, as was shown by the humorous saga of Maxwell Bodenheim in the *Quartier Latin*.

Having made a little money with his novel *Naked on Roller-Skates*, and being unable to resist the lure of the third class-tourist, Max had finally come over for a short stay, in the early 'thirties. That he had delayed his coming so long, was in all probability due to a premonition that he would be in danger of passing unnoticed here. He must remedy that; and so—still on the proceeds of those famous roller-skates—he must buy himself a dinner coat and stun us all. He did precisely that, and at once and inevitably became “Count Braga” to the cafes. Highly offended, he shifted to a green beret and proceeded to snub us by taking up with a Daring Young Woman on the High Diving-Board, a performer in one of the outlying Parisian amusement parks.

How the two ever got together remains a mystery, for the lady, a mid-European by birth, had an English vocabulary that was practically limited to “You are very nice” and “I think that is lolly.” Undeterred by this, Max would sit at the *D6me*, at the most conspicuous table he could find, and read his poems by the hour to “la plongeuse” who would drink it all in, smile sweedy at the conclusion of each piece, and murmur: “I think that is lolly!”

Meanwhile, if any American came near. Max would glare at him and cut him dead.

The climax came on the night of the Quatz' Arts Ball, which is the most hilarious affair of its kind to be found anywhere, with scantily draped models, as the evening grows late, throwing off what few clothes they had to begin with. Max and La Plongeuse were there, the former with a dinner coat by this time a little the worse for wear, but with his dignity unimpaired. If there had been a box, they would have occupied it. As it was, they sat there in solemn state and surveyed the vulgar, roistering throng; and then Max produced a packet of poems from his pocket. This was too much. Kiki, who would chance to be passing, snatched up a seltzer bottle and—her aim was excellent. With a scream, La Plongeuse dived for the door and Maxwell followed, picking up his poems as he went.

It is not to be thought that we treated all our visitors from home in this fashion. The celebrities were constantly coming and going, and the self-centered colony as a rule paid little attention to them. We did not, for example, realize that the quiet, unassuming young man whom we met at Bill and Mary Widney's and who was introduced to us as Thomas Wolfe was soon to become the famous author of *Look Homeward, Angel*. We did know who Elmer Rice was and gave him at least one typically Montparnasse vodka party in my tiny rue Delambre apartment. There must have been not less than a hundred people packed into those two small rooms — hall-bedroom size—and I can still see the bewildered look on Mr. Rice's face as he stood there

squeezed against the wall while Monny de Bouilly the Surrealist explained to him how he ought to have written *The Adding-Machine*.

There were others, though not many, from the theater— I think of Eva LeGallienne in particular—who passed through the Quarter from time to time; but the Hollywood of that day, fortunately, had not discovered us, and we were comparatively free of the visiting celebrity. Now and then, one of the deep-rooted American writers whom we respected, such as Sherwood Anderson or Alfred Kreymborg, would slip into town, but we saw little of them. Kreymborg associated with the Jolas-transition group and Anderson, also, stayed in a little hotel near the Odeon. They were different from Lewis; we felt that they should have been with us; but, as in the case of Dreiser, Paris did not “take” with them. Occasionally, too, we would be surprised to discover some figure of a former day who had been living among us for years without our being aware of it. Wilbur D. Nesbitt, for instance, one of the authors of my boyhood days, had an apartment at the Hotel Raspail.

If we did not get along so well, always, with Americans from home who had come over to see how and what we were doing, what it was we found in Paris, it cannot be said, on the other hand, that all was harmony in our own ranks. Anything but. The Left Bank as a whole was gregarious rather than collective, and the tendency was to go in little groups within the larger mass. This was especially true of the Americans, who had carried over many of their transatlantic feuds, coteries, and snobisms. The literary-artistic warfare that was waged by the French often took on what seemed to us an internecine intensity; but, when all was said, there was something impersonal, abstract,

something disinterested about it as contrasted with the bitter and frequently unreasoning hatred that existed among the expatriates. Possibly it was just because we were so far from home and were unable to agree upon our reasons for leaving home—those reasons could be so important! However this may be, the feuds were numerous and sometimes laughable. It was the cafe that served as the common meeting ground, where one might or might not nod to the enemy, depending upon one's own humor and his, the state of the ever variable Parisian weather, the comparative adequacy of the little charcoal-burning stove that was supposed to heat the terrace, how well one's work had gone that day, or some other tangible or intangible factor.

Perhaps the most amusing of the quarrels was the one of long standing between Gertrude Stein and her brother Leo, the painter and aesthete. The two had not spoken for years when, passing down the opposite side of the street, Gertrude forgot herself and nodded. She was so overcome by this that she at once went home and wrote a poem which is now one of the Steinian classics: "She nodded to her brother ..."

As has been said, we were not hard to please in the matter of amusement. In fact, we were rather astonishingly naive, for the most part. There was always something to keep the tables buzzing. If it was not a Sinclair Lewis or a Maxwell Bodenheim to whom we had accorded what we considered a fitting reception, or one of the many rows between groups or individuals that were constantly brewing or pending, there was sure to be some escapade on the part of one of our "characters," or some "wild party" that had just been given and had to be hashed over.

There was the time, for instance, when a more than usually ingenious, not to say diabolic, individual had gone to a studio affair clad only in a loin cloth consisting of strings of chocolate caramels, which he invited his host and the other guests to sample, presumably until he should be stripped. The great stripping act did not come off, however, at least as far as the gentleman with the caramels was concerned; for inside each of the candies was one of the strongest laxatives known to pharmaceutical science, and within a very few minutes the party was deserted, the cabinet being quite inadequate to accommodate the rush. For a week or so afterward, there was an epidemic of diarrhea in Montparnasse.

Or it might be the exploits of Line Gillespie and his friends. There were three of them who went around together: Line; a medical student acquaintance of his; and a young millionaire, quiet and respectable, who was the owner of a beautiful Lincoln car. Whenever Gillespie and the medico ran out of funds they would promptly sell the Lincoln to the first Frenchman who would buy it, and then would drink up the proceeds. The owner would always have to come around and, with a vast amount of difficulty and Gallic red tape, retrieve his car. The scheme worked very well until, one day, they made the mistake of trying to dispose of the Lincoln to a police officer who had been on their trail for some time. As a result, they found themselves up before a French magistrate. Things might have gone hard with them if it had not been for the fact that the magistrate in question happened to have a sense of humor—a rare thing in one in his position—and, moreover, in his youthful days had himself

been a “Sunday painter” and a denizen of Bohemia. He accordingly let them off as lightly as he could.

The Left Bank would not have been all it was, there would have been something lacking, and gossip, for one thing, would never have traveled so fast, we should not have been so *au courant*, if it had not been for Wambly Bald and his “Vie de Bohème” column in the Paris edition of the Chicago Tribune. Probably no columnist was ever more avidly read than he. He employed a sphinx like idiom which was wholly unintelligible to the place de l’Opera tourist and to those aristocratic Americans who dwelt in the neighborhood of the place de l’Opera, but which we of the Rive Gauche understood perfectly, as a rule, and appreciated to the full. Not always, however. Of necessity, he would often merely hint at things and we would then have to run them down for ourselves. He had a style that was somewhere in between *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *The New Yorker*, with a dash now and again of James Joyce or the Surrealists. It was a truly uncanny amalgam of prose, the like of which was never seen before or since.

The column, in short, was as unreal-sounding as its author’s name. We knew very little about Wambly beyond the fact that he came from Chicago, had been graduated from the University of Chicago, and was in the habit of wandering in and out of the Quarter like a slightly alcoholic ghost, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, and telling all. If we knew little about his background, he was inclined to tell us less. Like Henry Miller and so many others, he seemed to spring up and grow in the soil of his own “Bohème.” But we sometimes

suspected that he might be a genius in disguise— a genius too proud or too indolent to work at the trade.

Life in Montparnasse was not all on the amusing side, however. There was the case of Hart Crane, one of the finest of modern poets, a case that has already gone down in American literary annals: his savage, furniture-smashing, battle with police at the cafe Select; his imprisonment in the Same and the merciless beatings given him there; the excitement in the American colony over getting him out; and then, a little later, that tragic homeward bound voyage from Mexico and the suicidal leap from the ship's rail as the author of *The Bridge* dived to his death—the legend of the shark that rose to meet his body. And Hart Crane was not the only one; there were to be others.

If there was occasional tragedy, there was also for many the dull grind of daily hardship, a strapping poverty and the suffering it entailed, which made it hard to manage a smile in the cafe at night when someone else was buying the drinks; for despite all the tales of the gay Bohemian life, it is not so gay to go to bed without the few centimes for a café-croissant in the morning. One *can* starve in the Latin Quarter. I've seen it happen.

I saw it happen with a poet of the old school whose name is wholly forgotten now but who was a great friend and protégé of Ezra Pound's. I am referring to Cheever Dunning. In the last stages of tuberculosis and living in a room that resembled the traditional garret, Cheever was hungry most of the time and, some of us discovered, would actually go about picking up scraps out of the gutter. Pound and others helped him when they could do so without hurting

his feelings; for he was extremely proud and reticent and endeavored always to conceal his penury by putting on an air of cheerfulness or detachment. There was, simply, no means by which he could make a living. Finally, he sold some poems to an American magazine published in Paris, but the editor kept putting him off, insisting that he paid only on publication, and publication was long in coming. In the meantime Cheever died.

All Montparnasse, one might say, turned out for his funeral. Interment was in a suburban cemetery some distance from Paris and we had to take chartered buses to get there. It was a cold winter day, with that peculiar kind of Parisian cold that eats into your bones. We mourners were a silent, shivering lot, sad and thoughtful, and angry with the editor, whom we blamed for our friend's death. As if the few francs Cheever might have got for his poems would have saved his life! (The poems afterward appeared and I never heard of the poet's "estate" benefiting from them.) Here was the starving artist legend of the old days taking on reality, and it was a reality that we did not relish. Back in Montparnasse once more, we ordered Pernods to "warm us up," and that night it seemed as if everyone in the Quarter were drunk.

I saw it all but happen, also, with one of our best contemporary novelists, James T. Farrell, and his wife Dorothy. They came about as near starving as anyone could. But that is a story in itself.

One day, as associate editor of Edward Titus's *This Quarter*, I received a large packet of short stories, postmarked Chicago and bearing Farrell's signature. I

took them home with me along with some other manuscripts that night and started reading them.

“These get better and better” I remarked to my wife.

“Have you discovered another genius?” she asked, a little sarcastically.

“I don’t know—yet. I think maybe I have.”

For this was my own Chicago that was coming to life in these tales and sketches of back-o’-the-yards “punks” Of course, I never knew the back-o’-the-yards as Farrell does, but I knew enough about it to realize that this was the genuine article. I was enthusiastic, to put it mildly. That very evening I dashed off a note to the author: “I think your stuff is swell. Send us some more.” I did not know what “old man Titus” would think about these stories, but I was determined that they were going to be published—if necessary, I would start a magazine of my own!

Mr. Titus proved, if anything, even harder to convince than I had anticipated. I ought not to have been surprised, for his tastes ran rather to Ludwig Lewisohn and Michael Arlen, and he was especially fond of “names,” which were about the only thing that would lead him to violate his personal preferences. “This is rot!” was his first reaction. “Why! This fellow can’t even write.” The fight was on and it lasted a couple of weeks. In the meanwhile, by every boat, there arrived a fresh batch of stories ; I had never seen such an output and with the quality standing up so well to the quantity. “For God’s

sake, tell that chap out in Chicago to stop sending us his tripe!” Nevertheless, I did get Farrell into *This Quarter*, which, he afterward told me, was practically his first appearance in print. (Jolas, I believe, had rejected him for *transition*.)

That might have ended the matter, but it didn’t. One day, a month or so later, I met my wife by appointment down near the place de l’Opera. With her were a rather short young man with bushy hair and spectacles and an Irish face, and a wholesome-appearing young woman with red hair.

“This is Jimmy and Dorothy Farrell. I ran into them in the boulevard des Italiens. They just came in at the gare Saint- Lazare and were trying to find their way to Montparnasse.”

I was surprised, but not too surprised; for it was by no means uncommon for Americans from the most unlikely places suddenly to get the Left Bank fever, throw their things in a bag, and head for New York and the next boat over. And many of them would arrive all but penniless. I could only hope this was not the case with the Farrells. It was. I do not know what they expected to live on, but if it was Jimmy’s earnings from *This Quarter*, they had made a grave miscalculation. The magazine paid but little and at its leisure.

The Farrells, however, managed to hang on for some little while; just how, I do not believe they themselves could have told you. Lodged in a barren *chambre meublée*, they lived out of tins and on coffee and rolls while Jimmy was making up his mind—it did not take him long—that Montparnasse was

not for him. He was not in any sense a Montparnasse type. He felt ill at ease with us and we with him. We did not speak the same language. Our own cafe small talk was of Joyce and Stein and *transition* and the “Revolution of the Word,” whereas what he brought with him was a new America that was coming up, one we did not know existed, an America that was shortly to find expression in the social-literary movement of the 1930’s.

Farrell and his kind were the stay-at-home pluggers who, refusing “exile,” had chosen to slug it out with the native scene. As one American newspaper man in Paris said of Studs Lonigan’s creator: “He’s an exponent of stockyards realism, hard-boiled as hell.” Hard-boiled, yes; but not in the Hemingway tradition, whatever the superficial resemblances to that school. There was in Farrell a tenderness that was not that of a Hemingway in his tenderest moments—not even the Hemingway who wrote “Hills Like White Elephants.” A tenderness and a hope.

Jimmy himself was one of the most humanly sympathetic persons I have ever known. I have never known anyone with a deeper feeling for the outcasts of life, or who was capable of being more unobtrusively helpful to them when he could be. I have always had to smile when I have heard it said that he has a hardness if not a contempt for the types that he portrays and for the plain people of earth. I had a chance, in Paris, to see that this was not true, and at a time when he himself needed material help. For he did need it badly before he left. When his wife gave birth to a child in the American Hospital, a child that lived but a few days, he found himself without even the money to pay for

having it cremated. I am violating no confidence in telling this, for he has put it all into a well-known short story: "Honey, We'll Be Brave."

Farrell's Paris experience was a tragic one, but it was not the deeper tragedy of disintegration exemplified by Hart Crane and so many others. Rather, it was the beginning for Farrell. Shortly after his return to the States, Vanguard Press brought out the first of the Studs Lonigan novels. A little more than a decade later the trilogy was to be looked upon as a modern classic.

Even before he left France, brief as was his stay there, Farrell had laid the basis of a Continental reputation. *Young Lonigan* not long afterward appeared in French translation; and writing of this work, the distinguished critic, Ramon Fernandez, observed that "Nothing could be more 'pure' than this novel, if by purity one means at once freshness and a clear-seeing eye. The author's stroke has to be heavy at moments to show how delicate it is. We are especially pleased to find such a novel as this coming out of America, as an antidote to the pessimism, somewhat too black and somewhat too bald, which for some while past we have come to look for from that quarter. This is not to say that any compromise is thereby made with life's essential wretchedness."

Farrell, as I have said, was with Homer Bevans that night upon my return to America when I ran into the latter on the edge of the Village. At that moment I was very much upset over the fact that the depression had forced me to abandon my little retreat in southern France, where I had expected to dig in for the rest of my life, milk the goats, and devote myself to study. Mournfully, I produced the photographs of my three thousand- franc mansion in

Mirmande. Homer was sympathetic; -he understood; but Jimmy for once was not. I recall the curl of his lips as he said: "I'll take America for mine." I think it was that night that I began to realize how much we "exiles" had to unlearn. Homer was not the only one who sensed a void. We all had had something taken from us. From now on there was to be a persisting gulf between those who went and those who stayed, between those who in the 'twenties had chosen expatriation and the new and younger ones like Farrell who had begun by rejecting it.

In sharp contrast to Farrell was Henry Miller. Like Wambly Bald, Henry was more or less an unknown quantity for us when he first arrived in Montparnasse. We knew that he was a proofreader on the Paris edition of the Chicago Tribune, that was about all. By reason of his hours, we saw him chiefly late at night or early in the morning. He would come in after the paper had gone to press and would invariably contrive to make an entrance of it, a broad ingenuous grin on his face and a somewhat timid twinkle behind his spectacles — spectacles which, so it was said, he was forever leaving behind him on the banks of the Seine, where for the sake of Hugoesque color he frequently spent the night with the Parisian lower depths. We also came to know him from the vinous-streaked dawn at the *Coupole*; and here, when he felt that he had a properly appreciative audience, he would expound his *Weltanschauung*, principally in words of four letters. Briefly stated, it was to the effect that prostitutes are about the only pure beings to be found in a world of reeking garbage. Not a highly original conception; but provided his listeners had had a sufficient number of Pernods, he could lend it all the force

of novelty. Once in a while, when the alcoholic fumes began to evaporate, someone would emerge from his trance and mutter:

“For Christ’s sake. Hank, why don’t you write a book? It ought to be a goddamned classic, or maybe even a best-seller. To most of us, to all save a few intimates. Miller was not even a “type,” but merely someone on the edge of things. Very few suspected that he was interested in writing, much less that he himself wrote. I gave him his first publication, with his “Mademoiselle Claude” story, in the third issue of the *New Review*. I published this contribution because I liked it as a piece of prose, but especially, because I felt that it was a good expression of Montparnasse life in that era and of a prevalent type of expatriate—the Henry Miller type. If Miller was atypical in any way, it was, perhaps, in the greater amount of interest, or more intelligent interest, that he exhibited in at least a certain phase of French life and in certain aspects of contemporary French writing. He associated more with the natives of the country than many Americans did, even though his interest appeared to be confined largely to prostitutes and other representatives of the demimonde. And he had heard of the Surrealists and was later to read, at my suggestion, Louis Ferdinand Céline’s *Journey to the End of the Night*, the author and the book that may be said to have made him what he is today. (How well he understood Céline, I have never been able to decide.)

There were, to be sure, other Americans who had a predilection for *les filles de joie*; the difference was that out of this milieu Henry was gradually to evolve a philosophy of life, if it may be called that, certainly an outlook on the world. There were, as I see it, two things that tended to crystallize the

process for him: one was the company and influence of Alfred Perles; the other was Celine. First Perles and then Celine showed him how he might erect a literary point of view out of the life that he loved and. lived, and thereby provided him with a stock in trade. Henry had made the discovery that Gauguin did that morning when the latter awoke to exclaim "*Merdel Merde!* All is *merde!*" This point of view may be seen in an early stage of formulation in "Mademoiselle Claude" and in a later, more developed one in the *Tropic of Cancer*. In the interim, Miller had read his Céline.

I have spoken of Alfred Perles, who was Miller's inseparable shadow; or was it the other way around? Perles's name is now well known in England and America to readers of the very precious advance-guard publications, and even then he had his Montparnasse-blown legend. A part of it he once related to me, himself, when the mood was on him. A lieutenant, I believe it was, in the Austrian Army in the First World War, he was lying in wait for the enemy with his men. When the moment came, he was supposed to rise and give the signal to charge; but instead, he simply lay there, mentally paralyzed, unable to move. The result was that a non-com had to take over and Perles was later court-martialed and saved only through the influence of his family. Such is the tale as he told it; it may be true or it may be apocryphal; he may have had another to tell the next time, to someone else. I should like to believe it, for it would explain Alfred rather neatly, and it might help to explain Henry Miller as well.

Like Miller, Perles was an expounder of the Philosophy of Universal Filth; but unlike his friend, he had a wide European culture to draw upon, an equal

facility of expression in three languages, and, what is more to the point, a certain sense of futile automatism that was the unmistakable mark and heritage of the young after-war generation. That he had a very great and direct influence upon Miller's thinking, no one who knew the pair could doubt.

I was back in America on a flying visit in the summer of 1931 when the number of the *New Review* with Miller's story appeared. At his request, I took a copy around to some of the publishers. I shall not forget the hauteur with which one young literary editor informed me: "I don't believe we care to publish Mr. Miller." Another said: "Whorehouse stuff." Another: "Plain pornography." Yet ten years later I was to pick up a literary review and find an article extolling

Henry Miller as one of the great and neglected writers of our time, and the article was signed by the same individual who had been so haughty about "Mademoiselle Claude." Something had happened. It was not merely that Miller had matured his point of view and his style; that point of view had come to suit the temper of the times in those days of the great disillusionment, the later 'thirties; it suited the reaction that had set in against the mid-decade rush for the "proletarian" band-wagon.

We naturally were not aware that Henry was destined to become a writer who within a dozen years or so would be mentioned by the undergraduate in the same breath with Joyce, and who would even take it upon himself to try to dethrone the author of *Ulysses*. It is the old case of I knew him when. To us he was a good drinking companion, a nice guy to run into at Jimmy's or the

*Coupo*le or in those desolate shivering hours at the Dome as we watched the dawn come creeping down the boulevard du Montparnasse to awaken M. Potin's grocer boys across the way and send the "artists" home to bed. We found him humorous, affable, generous, somewhat reserved with those who did not know him well, and with a certain timidity behind it all.

There was a rumor that once upon a time, back in America, Henry had gone around with a copy of Karl Marx under his arm; but there was certainly nothing to show it now. His later writings indicate that he does not know the difference between a prolétaire and a lumpen-prolétaire. One of his pet aversions in those days—his and Perles's—was Jimmy Farrell. That, in looking back, is not hard to understand. With opposing views of life, Farrell and Miller represented the two diverging paths which the more significant American writing of the turbulent depression-ridden 'thirties was to take. Meanwhile, whatever may be said of Miller, he has summed up for us as no one else has the expatriates' Paris of the second phase: and I think it may be said that the *Tropic of Cancer* is to

that phase what *The Sun Also Rises* is to the preceding one.

Such the Montparnasse we knew: a weird little land crowded with artists, alcoholics, prostitutes, pimps, poseurs, college boys, tourists, society slummers, spendthrifts, beggars, homosexuals, drug addicts, nymphomaniacs, sadists, masochists, thieves, gamblers, confidence men, mystics, fakers, paranoiacs, political refugees, anarchists, "Dukes" and "Countesses," men and women without a country; a land filled with a gaiety sometimes real and

often feigned, filled with sorrow, suffering, poverty, frustration, bitterness, tragedy, suicide. Not only was there never any place like it; Montparnasse itself had never been before and never will be again what it was in the 1920's. For it was essentially a part of the first après-guerre, and from 1929 on it began dying.

There was one event that foreshadowed the end, had we seen it for what it was. It occurred on the evening of August 23, 1927. We were living in Suresnes at the time, and, having put the baby to bed, my wife and I had gone down to the little river-front cafe that we frequented, for our coffee and liqueur. We found the place packed that night with workingmen whose eyes glared at us from all corners of the room. Not alone their eyes but their gestures as well were menacing. Riva and I had just remarked it when the proprietor, who knew us well, came up.

“If Monsieur-Madame will pardon me,” he said, “I would suggest that they go. It is dangerous. You see, you are Americans, and—well, they do not like Americans—tonight.”

We thought it strange; but as there was a stir at the near-by tables and, as I fancied, a movement in our direction, we decided to leave without asking any further questions.

“Well,” I remarked, “I don't understand it, I'm sure; but seeing that we're out and this is the only decent place in Suresnes, why not go on in to Paris—how about the *Dome*? We haven't been there for a long while.”

Coming down along the boulevard Raspail on the bus. we noticed signs of tumult as we neared the carrefour Vavin. There was a large crowd milling about in the square, and we could see residents of the Quarter, many of whom we recognized, running in all directions. As we alighted in front of the *Rotonde* and glanced down the boulevard du Montparnasse, we saw what was happening. We saw, but we did not understand. The cafe terraces were in turmoil; they were being invaded by men dressed like laborers, tables were being overturned, chairs were being hurled, there was a crash of china and glassware, and customers male and female were being tossed into the street. Someone ran past and shouted:

“Get out! Get out of here, quick!” We acted on this advice.

“What’s it all about?” we wondered. First our experience at Suresnes, now this. Back in the place de l’Opera once more, I decided to buy a paper and find out if I could. As I came up to the kiosk, my eye caught the headline:

SACCO AND VANZETTI EXECUTED!

The Parisian workers were having their revenge.

{ Chapter IV from *Paris Was Our Mistress: Memories of a Lost and Found Generation*, (1947) }

Seven Pictorials of Kiki de Montparnasse by ManRay













Pictorial: Mother ... what's an orgasm?



Poems by Hart Crane

Annunciations

The anxious milk-blood in the veins of the earth,
That strives long and quiet to sever the girth
Of greenery ... Below the roots, a quickening shiver
Aroused by some light that had sensed,—ere the shiver
Of the first moth's descent,—day's predestiny ...
The sound of a dove's flight waved over the lawn ...
The moans of travail in one dearest beside me ...
Then high cries from great chasms of chaos outdrawn—
Hush! these things were all heard before dawn.

The Bathers

Two ivory women by a milky sea;—
The dawn, a shell's pale lining restlessly
Shimmering over a black mountain-spear:—
A dreamer might see these, and wake to hear,
But there is no sound,—not even a bird-note;
Only simple ripples flaunt, and stroke, and float,—
Flat lily petals to the sea's white throat.
They say that Venus shot through foam to light,
But they are wrong ... Ere man was given sight
She came in such still water, and so nursed
In silence, beauty blessed and beauty cursed.

Black Tambourine

Mark tardy judgment on the world's closed door.
Gnats toss in the shadow of a bottle,
And a roach spans a crevice in the floor.

Aesop, driven to pondering, found
Heaven with the tortoise and the hare;
Fox brush and sow ear top his grave

And mingling incantations on the air.
The black man, forlorn in the cellar,
Wanders in some mid-kingdom, dark, that lies,
Between his tambourine, stuck on the wall,
And, in Africa, a carcass quick with flies.

C-33

He has woven rose-vines
About the empty heart of night,
And vented his long mellowed wines
Of dreaming on the desert white
With searing sophistry.
And he tented with far thruths he would form
The transient bosoms from the thorny tree.

O Materna! to enrich thy gold head
And wavering shoulders with a new light shed
From penitence, must needs bring pain,
And with it song of minor, broken strain.
But you who hear the lamp whisper thru night
Can trace paths tear-wet, and forget all blight.

Carmen De Boheme

Sinuously winding through the room
On smokey tongues of sweetened cigarettes, --
Plaintive yet proud the cello tones resume
The andante of smooth hopes and lost regrets.

Bright peacocks drink from flame-pots by the wall,
Just as absinthe-sipping women shiver through
With shimmering blue from the bowl in Circe's hall.
Their brown eyes blacken, and the blue drop hue.

The andante quivers with crescendo's start,
And dies on fire's birth in each man's heart.
The tapestry betrays a finger through
The slit, soft-pulling; -- -- -- and music follows cue.

There is a sweep, -- a shattering, -- a choir
Disquieting of barbarous fantasy.

The pulse is in the ears, the heart is higher,
And stretches up through mortal eyes to see.

Carmen! Akimbo arms and smoldering eyes; --
Carmen! Bestirring hope and lipping eyes; --
Carmen whirls, and music swirls and dips.
"Carmen!," comes awed from wine-hot lips.

Finale leaves in silence to replume
Bent wings, and Carmen with her flaunts through the gloom
Of whispering tapestry, brown with old fringe: --
The winers leave too, and the small lamps twinge.

Morning: and through the foggy city gate
A gypsy wagon wiggles, striving straight.
And some dream still of Carmen's mystic face, --
Yellow, pallid, like ancient lace.

Carrier Letter

My hands have not touched water since your hands,—
No;—nor my lips freed laughter since 'farewell.'"
And with the day, distance again expands
Between us, voiceless as an uncoiled shell.

Yet,—much follows, much endures ... Trust birds alone:

A dove's wings clung about my heart last night
With surging gentleness; and the blue stone
Set in the tryst-ring has but worn more bright.

Chaplinesque

We make our meek adjustments,
Contented with such random consolations
As the wind deposits
In slithered and too ample pockets.

For we can still love the world, who find
A famished kitten on the step, and know
Recesses for it from the fury of the street,
Or warm torn elbow coverts.

We will sidestep, and to the final smirk
Dally the doom of that inevitable thumb
That slowly chafes its puckered index toward us,
Facing the dull squint with what innocence
And what surprise!

And yet these fine collapses are not lies
More than the pirouettes of any pliant cane;
Our obsequies are, in a way, no enterprise.
We can evade you, and all else but the heart:

What blame to us if the heart live on.

The game enforces smirks; but we have seen
The moon in lonely alleys make
A grail of laughter of an empty ash can,
And through all sound of gaiety and quest
Have heard a kitten in the wilderness.

Echoes

1

Slivers of rain upon the pane,
Jade-green with sunlight, melt and flow
Upward again:—they leave no stain
Of storm or strain an hour ago.

2

Over the hill a last cloud dips,
And disappears, and I should go
Silently, now, but that your lips
Are warmer with a redder glow.

3

Fresh and fragile, your arms now
Are circles of cool roses,—so. . . .
In opal pools beneath your brow

I dream we quarreled long, long ago.

Fear

The host, he says that all is well,
And the fire-wood glow is bright;
The food has a warm and tempting smell, —
But on the window licks the night.

Pile on the logs ... Give me your hands.
Friends! No, — it is not fright ...
But hold me ... somewhere I heard demands ...
And on the window licks the night.

Forgetfulness

Forgetfulness is like a song
That, freed from beat and measure, wanders.

Forgetfulness is like a bird whose wings are reconciled,
Outspread and motionless, —
A bird that coasts the wind unwearyingly.
Forgetfulness is rain at night,
Or an old house in a forest, — or a child.
Forgetfulness is white, — white as a blasted tree,
And it may stun the sybil into prophecy,

Or bury the Gods.

I can remember much forgetfulness.

Garden Abstract

The apple on its bough is her desire—
Shining suspension, mimic of the sun.
The bough has caught her breath up, and her voice,
Dumbly articulate in the slant and rise
Of branch on branch above her, blurs her eyes.
She is prisoner of the tree and its green fingers.

And so she comes to dream herself the tree,
The wind possessing her—weaving her young veins,
Holding her to the sky and its quick blue,
Drowning the fever of her hands in sunlight.
She has no memory, nor fear, nor hope
Beyond the grass and shadows at her feet.

The Great Western Plains

The little voices of the prairie dogs
Are tireless . . .
They will give three hurrahs
Alike to stage, equestrian, and pullman,

And all unstingingly as to the moon.

And Fifi's bows and poodle ease
Whirl by them centred on the lap
Of Lottie Honeydew, movie queen,
Toward lawyers and Nevada.

And how much more they cannot see!
Alas, there is so little time,
The world moves by so fast these days!
Burrowing in silk is not their way --
And yet they know the tomahawk.

Indeed, old memories come back to life;
Pathetic yelps have sometimes greeted
Noses pressed against the glass.

The Hive

Up the chasm-walls of my bleeding heart
Humanity pecks, claws, sobs, and climbs;
Up the inside, and over every part
Of the hive of the world that is my heart.

And of all the sowing, and all the tear-tendering,
And reaping, have mercy and love issued forth.

Mercy, white milk, and honey, gold love—
And I watch, and say, “These the anguish are worth.”

In Shadow

Out in the late amber afternoon,
Confused among chrysanthemums,
Her parasol, a pale balloon,
Like a waiting moon, in shadow swims.

Her furtive lace and misty hair
Over the garden dial distill
The sunlight,—then withdrawing, wear
Again the shadows at her will.

Gently yet suddenly, the sheen
Of stars inwraps her parasol.
She hears my step behind the green
Twilight, stiller than shadows, fall.

“Come, it is too late,—too late
To risk alone the light’s decline:
Nor has the evening long to wait,”—
But her own words are night’s and mine.

Interior

It sheds a shy solemnity,
This lamp in our poor room.
O grey and gold amenity, --
Silence and gentle gloom!

Wide from the world, a stolen hour
We claim, and none may know
How love blooms like a tardy flower
Here in the day's after-glow.

And even should the world break in
With jealous threat and guile,
The world, at last, must bow and win
Our pity and a smile.

Legende

The tossing loneliness of many nights
Rounds off my memory of her.
Like a shell surrendered to evening sands,
Yet called adrift again at every dawn,
She has become a pathos,—
Waif of the tides.

The sand and sea have had their way,
And moons of spring and autumn,—

All, save I,
And even my vision will be erased
As a cameo the waves claim again.

Locutions des Pierrots

I
Your eyes, those pools with soft rushes,
O prodigal and wholly dilatory lady,
Come now, when will they restore me
The orient moon of my dapper affections?

For imminent is that moment when,
Because of your perverse austerities,
My crisp soul will be flooded by a languor
Bland as the wide gaze of a Newfoundland.

Ah, madame! truly it's not right
When one isn't the real Gioconda,
To adaptate her methods and deportment
For snaring the poor world in a blue funk.

II

Ah! the divine infatuation
That I nurse for Cydalise
Now that she has fled the capture

Of my lunar sensibility!

True, I nibble at despondencies
Among the flowers of her domain
To the sole end of discovering
What is her unique propensity!

—Which is to be mine, you say?
Alas, you know how much I oppose
A stiff denial to postures
That seem too much impromptu.

III

Ah! without the moon, what white nights,
What nightmares rich with ingenuity!
Don't I see your white swans there?
Doesn't someone come to turn the knob?

And it's your fault that I'm this way.
That my conscience sees double,
And my heart fishes in troubled water
For Eve, Gioconda and Dalila.

Oh, by the infinite circumflex
Of the archbeam of my cross-legged labours,

Come now—appease me just a little
With the why-and-wherefore of Your Sex!

Modern Craft

Though I have touched her flesh of moons,
Still she sits gestureless and mute,
Drowning cool pearls in alcohol.
O blameless shyness; — innocence dissolute!

She hazards jet; wears tiger-lilies; —
And bolts herself within a jewelled belt.
Too many palms have grazed her shoulders:
Surely she must have felt.

Ophelia had such eyes; but she
Even, sank in love and choked with flowers.
This burns and is not burnt ... My modern love were
Charred at a stake in younger times than ours.

My Grandmother's Love Letters

There are no stars to-night
But those of memory.
Yet how much room for memory there is
In the loose girdle of soft rain.

There is even room enough
For the letters of my mother's mother,
Elizabeth,
That have been pressed so long
Into a corner of the roof,
That they are brown and soft,
And liable to melt as snow.

Over the greatness of such space
Steps must be gentle.
It is all hung by an invisible white hair.
It trembles as birch limbs webbing the air.

And I ask myself:-

“Are your fingers long enough to play
Old keys that are but echoes;
Is the silence strong enough
To carry back the music to its source
And back to you again,
As though to her?”

Yet I would lead my grandmother by the hand
Through much of what she would not understand;
And so I stumble, and the rain continues on the roof
With such a sound of gently pitying laughter.

October-November

Indian-summer-sun

With crimson feathers whips away the mists, —
Dives through the filter of trellises
And gilds the silver on the blotched arbor-seats.

Now gold and purple scintillate
On trees that seem dancing
In delirium ;
Then the moon
In a mad orange flare
Floods the grape-hung night.

Pastorale

No more violets,
And the year
Boken into smoky panels.
What woods remember now
Her calls, her enthusiasms.

That ritual of sap and leaves
The sun drew out,
Ends in this latter muffled
Bronze and brass. The wind
Takes rein.

If, dusty, I bear

An image beyond this
Already fallen harvest,
I can only query, "Fool—
Have you remembered too long;

Or was there too little said
For ease or resolution—
Summer scarcely begun
And violets,
A few picked, the rest dead?"

A Persuasion

If she waits late at night
Hearing the wind,
It is to gather kindnesses
No world can offer.

She has drawn her hands away.
The wind plays andantes
Of lost hopes and regrets,—
And yet is kind.

Below the wind,
Waiting for morning
The hills lie curved and blent

As now her heart and mind.

Porphyro in Akron

I

Greeting the dawn

A shift of rubber workers presses down

South Main.

With the stubbornness of muddy water

It dwindles at each cross-line

Until you feel the weight of many cars,

North-bound, and East and West,

Absorbing and conveying weariness,—

Rumbling over the hills.

Akron, "high place,"—

A bunch of smoking hills

Among rolling Ohio hills.

The dark-skinned Greeks grin at each other

In the streets and alleys.

The Greek grins and fights with the Swede,—

And the Fjords and the Aegean are remembered.

The plough, the sword,

The trowel,—and the monkey wrench!

O City, your axles need not the oil of song.

I will whisper words to myself
And put them in my pockets.
I will go and pitch quoits with old men
In the dust of a road.

II

And some of them will be "Americans,"
Using the latest ice-box and buying Fords;
And others—

I remember one Sunday noon,
Harry and I, "the gentlemen,"—seated around
A table of raisin-jack and wine, our host
Setting down a glass and saying,—
"One month,—I go back rich.

I ride black horse ... Have many sheep."
And his wife, like a mountain, coming in
With four tiny black-eyed girls around her
Twinkling like little Christmas trees.

And some Sunday fiddlers,
Rumanian business men,
Played ragtime and dances before the door,
And we overpayed them because we felt

like it.

III

Pull down the hotel counterpane
And hitch yourself up to your book.

"Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,
And threw warm gules on Madeleine's fair
breast,
As down she knelt for heaven's grace and
boon..."

"Connais tu le pays ...?"

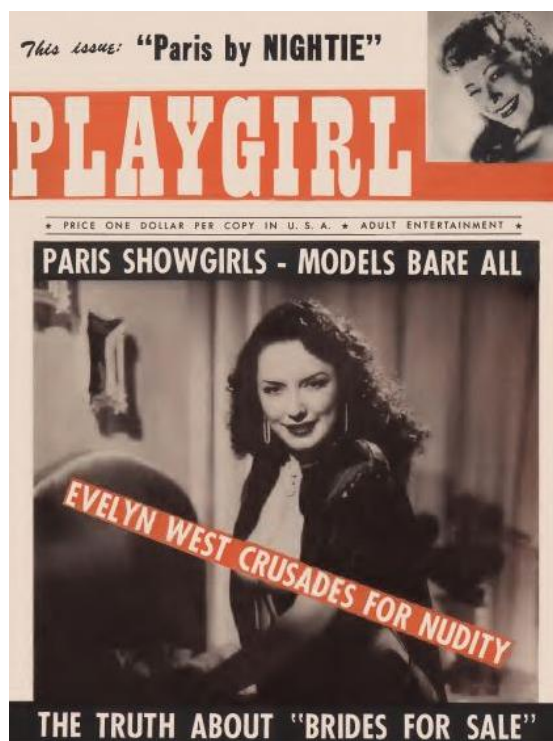
Your mother sang that in a stuffy parlour
One summer day in a little town
Where you had started to grow.
And you were outside as soon as you
Could get away from the company
To find the only rose on the bush
in the front yard.

But look up, Porphyro—your toes
Are ridiculously tapping
The spindles at the foot of the bed.

The stars are drowned in a slow rain,
And a hash of noises is slung up from the
street.

You ought, really, to try to sleep,
Even though, in this town, poetry's a
Bedroom occupation.

An expose of the Vedette Evelyn West ...

















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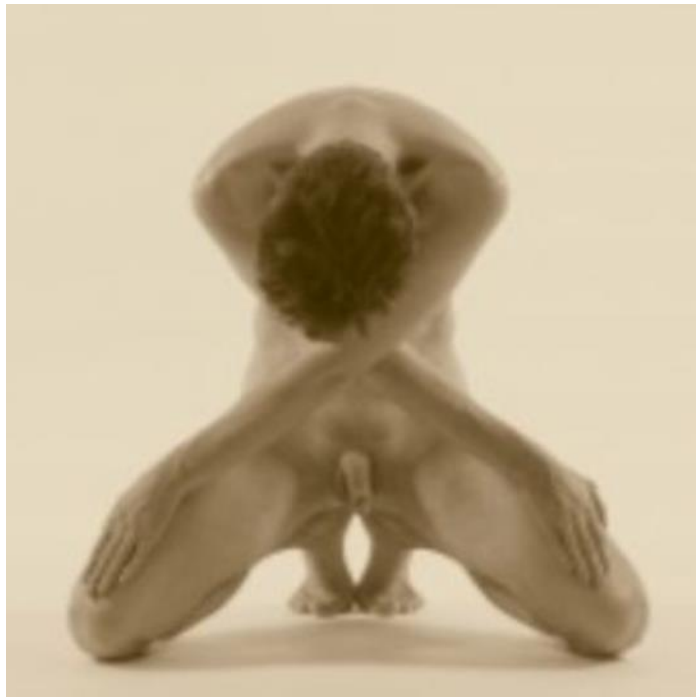




































Something Very Weird



The Warehouse Party by Gary McCrae

[**San Francisco**] The 1960's is fondly remembered but many people who are now in their 80's. For the rest of you, well, you just have to read the stories and perhaps smile. Not everything from the 1960's was memorable mind you – the loss of two Kennedys and a King, the Viet Nam War, the Hong Kong Flu – but the decade was about youthfulness and about fun. It would be about racing to the Moon and beating the Ruskies. It was the time of the baby-boomers, of which I was one, a boy from Victoria who had meandered down to California to live the Cali lifestyle. And what a life-style!

The 1950's had been staid and proper. That long ten years was all about Ike, and the bomb and flashy cars and a boring, albeit pleasant, home life. But such pleasantries were not for everyone. There were the adventurous types, boys and girls (mostly boys until the pill came along).

You might wonder why the Cali life was so full of hippies and deadheads. It may have simply been that in the States you had three coasts, the East, the Gulf and the West ... the East was too prim and proper, the Gulf too rugged and still the frontier... on Cali anything could go and no one would really care. Oh, and the weather, let me tell you about the weather here in Cali ... it never snowed and only seemed to rain when the rain was expected. And it rarely rained on anyone's parade.

On the East Coast you had New York, Greenwich Village, Andy Warhol and the Factory ... and a different Martini for every day in the month. On the Gulf

you had New Orleans and Mardi Gras ... which might have started on a Thursday but would continue for as long as the bourbon and bathtub hooch held out. On the West Coast ... well it was perhaps one big party of you knew the right people. Lucky for me I did.

Who were the right people? It depended who you were and what you wanted in life. Being an artist, I wanted to hang about with other creative people. In San Francisco you didn't have to look very far to find them. Or perhaps they found you. I was a graduate of the *Rudolph Schaeffer School of Art and Design*. Somehow I had acquired a reputation for my creativity, most fabric work in the Notam style.

At the time I lived in a four story walk up in the Mission District and had a neighbor who took a liking to me. She always seemed to be prowling about when I left for work or came home late at night. I don't know how she did it ... perhaps she asked the right people the right questions ... but she knew an awful lot about me. But the situation was not mutual. I didn't really know much about her. It is not that she grew on me ... she sort of glommed on me. She wanted me to take her out ... and 'show her the sights.'

This was odd for me for I was the 'out-of-towner' and she had grown up in Cali. I think she was lonely, because she started to call me 'her man.' She said this to the postman who delivered our mail; To the grocery at the corner store; The druggist at the end of the block ... and then to me (I was the last to be told the news). She wanted to be taken out.

Oh boy ... complications. But they were of the pleasant kind. She was a petite girl a few years younger than me. A bouncy brunette, well read, at least of the popular genre. She was well turned out in her simple fashions. She had few pretenses, except, of course towards me. Having a soft heart I let her play out that charade.

‘Will you take me out?’ Her eyes were luscious pools of emotion. If she were a kitten she could sit on my lap with those eyes.

A kitten has a way with people. It is not an imposing way, just a persistence that can’t be faulted. She purred and purred and purred, until I could not say no to her.

To stop her purring I relented. “Ok ... where do you want to go and what do you want to do?”

“This Saturday ... let’s do something together this Saturday evening.” She seemed most insistent. I could have said no ... I should have said no ... but I didn’t.

Well one of the few carry-overs from my ‘50’s up-bringing was my Saturday night was bath night; a warm bath, a good book and perhaps Sinatra on the radio. Yes ... I know ... how quaint, but the rest of my week is so busy that I don’t have much time to wash between my toes, behind my ears nor even scrub my back.

But she was most unrelenting. “Saturday night ...” like Chinese water torture ... drip ... drip ... drip ... “Saturday night ...”

All during the week I asked “and what about Saturday night?”

And all during the week she answered enigmatically “you’ll see!”

By Friday she had me around her little finger. I caught her, for once, arriving home with her arms full of two grocery bags, and being a gallant dandy I took them off her arms and she invited me into her apartment, two floor down from mine, for a glass of wine. I sat at her kitchen table as she set out her groceries. What is the difference between ‘putting away’ and ‘setting out?’ you may ask. She had bought things for a get together – wine, crackers, hors d’oeuvres and cheese.

I asked her whether this ‘lay-out’ was for Saturday Night. She just smiled enigmatically. ‘Just wear something nice,’ she replied.

Yes ... needless complications. I wondered if I should step in front of a tram and break my leg ...

Though I was worried I managed to get a good sleep that night since I knew I was going to need it ... Saturday Night ... what had she planned for our Saturday Night?

The following afternoon, around 4 she ordered us a taxi and when it arrived around 6 she handed the driver a small piece of paper. As we settled into the back seat she turned to me, smiled and said “trust me ...” I had seen her smile often before, but this smile had an edge to it.

Have you ever been told by a friend ...”trust me.” And, what resulted from this? Something good I hope. As I recount what our Saturday Night would become I leave it to you to decide what it became ... if you get my meaning,

It was a surprise as we left the fashionable parts of ‘Frisco behind us and made our way to the seedy warehouse district. Most of the buildings were old and abandoned, except one, the one we pulled up to. The taxi man gave us a wondering look ‘ you’re the third fare I have dropped off here this evening ...’

We got out and started to the door. There were two bouncers but they were unexpected. Instead of being two mighty gorillas. They were two fashionably dressed women, one with a phone in her hand. I guess someone at the other end of the phone would give the nod.

My friend smiled and one of the women replied in kind. The other one spoke a word or two into the phone. There was a pause then a nod and then we were in.

The ground floor of the warehouse was empty, dark, dusty and grey. The only colour and light was near the freight elevator at the back. As we walked across

the floor, my friend's high heel shoes produced a clickety-clack sound that just made the room seem twice as hollow and four times as ominous. What had I gotten myself into, I thought during the long and *horrorisant* trod to the elevator.

Again, two very fashionably dressed women at the elevator, one to usher us into the lift, and close the heavy metal door behind us, and the other to operate the heavy metal lift mechanism. The lift operator was as tiny as a mouse. I could see she took all her strength to operate the lever mechanism, but by the smile on her face I knew she was enjoying the whole power trip.

It was a slow ascent to the top floor. And with each passage of a floor the sound of a get together got louder and louder. The sound was hard to describe. It was a mix between a rumble and a rabble. The rumble came from jazz being played live and the rabble came from the myriad of the voices of the party goers.

My friend had set our sights on the most unique party of that '60's season. I had heard rumors that some gathering was going to happen ... they called them happenings, as if they were spontaneous ... but the rumors were just wisps and whispers, here and there among my circle of creatives. Well this was anything but spontaneous.

The bars to the lift could not be lifted fast enough for my friend she peered through the bars like a hungry tigress before her meal. She looked up at me with eyes that sparkled and a smile that could melt an iceberg.

“Aren’t you glad you trusted me?” She dashed into the crowd. I stepped off the lift and looked around the large floor.

The rabble was a mix of fashionables and hippies. I recognized Allen Ginsberg, John Kerouac and Paddy O’Sullivan. Like three vertices of an equilateral triangle they marked their territory among admiring gaggles of partygoers, mostly women fashionably dressed.

My friend rushed back and grabbed my hand and excitedly bellowed “let me introduce you to someone I know.” The lift door slammed shut behind me and I felt like I was about to be thrown to the tigers. I am not one for parties. Let alone large parties, let alone circuses, but I was here and she was here and well she was pretty strong for her slight height and weight. She dragged me along, through the rabble, parting the people like a Moses parting a troubled waters.

It was to Paddy O’Sullivan she dragged me. He looked up at me with big, bushy, bored eyes as he said “glad you could make it,” above the *horrorisant* sound and patted my friend on her backside with his big, bushy bored hands.

She didn’t mind the man handling.

The two started into an unfinished conversation they had from a previous encounter and so I soon felt the third man ... I let them prattle on and smiled meekly from time to time, nodding for effect, and as they got further and

further into something to do with *avant garde* poetry I drifted over to the jazz band.

They were in a world all their own. Smoke drifted up from the fags they each dragged on. Its sweet aroma always made me ill, but it was what it was, and it was what was giving them the inspiration to *play jazz*.

I felt a pinch on my backside and whirled around to find my friend holding two beer bottles in one hand and playing the crab with the other. She handed me a beer bottle and then clinked hers to mind.

“Thanks ...”

“For what?” I answered.

“For bringing me here ...” She waved her beer bottle around the room, spilling some beer onto the floor. She used to right foot to spread the beer around.

I waited until she looked back up at me before I said “shouldn’t I be the one thanking you?”

She shrugged her shoulders and drank some of her beer.

To be perfectly honest I am not a beer man but I owed it to her and drank a swig. Wretched stuff beer ... even iced cold ... by the time I had finished the swig she had disappeared. It would be like that for the next hour or so. She

would put in her reappearance and then disappear in the blink of an eye. I don't know if she was doing this for her own reassurance, or whether she was keeping tabs on me. I returned back to the *jazz*.

Off in one corner of the floor behind a blind hanging from the rafters something caught my eye. It was the flash of a small Krieg light. Someone was filming. Being a curious sort I drifted over and walked around the edge of the blind to discover to my great surprise a scene out of a Grosz painting. There was a large billiards table with one man and three women. He was fully clothed while the three women were in their dainties. The three women were playing billiards while the man was watching them. A women was doing the filming. I was about to duck back to the other side of the blind when one of the women waved me to stay.

So I did. I watched as a game of what could only be called strip billiards was played out by the three women. It sort of turned into this:



This isn't an actual picture from that evening, but it is close enough of a similitude.

Then once again, my friend reappeared. She grabbed my hand and tugged me back to the rabble. "Naughty boy," she said with a feline expression on her face.

This time she introduced me to John Kerouac. Again the two of them spoke like old friends. Again I just sat there listening. This time my friend took note, leaned over and whispered, 'don't you want to talk with him?'

"About what?" I whispered back.

"About his writing ... his book!"

"Haven't read any of his writing ..."

She peered at me with such astonishment that Kerouac asked her "what's the fuss?"

Embarrassed of me and my ignorance she said "oh ... nothing," to him.

In an understanding fashion Kerouac replied "It's ok if he hasn't read my book. Lot's of folks haven't read my book" and looking up at me with stern eyes he continued "and never will..."

“Oh he will” my friend said scornfully “oh he will.” Then she turned he back on me as a rebuke.

Fine by me, and I drifted away as she and he launched into some esoteric psychoanalysis of traveling and dreams.

My throat was dry. I was still holding my beer and took another swig. Wretched stuff!

Across the room I could see Allen Ginsberg leaning up against some abandoned crates in an animate conversation with several women. It was then that I realized that there were perhaps four times as many women here as men. The women were all dressed to the nines, while them men, or at least O’Sullivan, Kerouac and Ginsberg were dressed like longshoremen. I was the odd man out in my silks and cashmere. Did I tell you I am a dandy?

Suddenly there was a ringing of the emergency bell on the lift and it was like someone had dropped a fox in among the chickens.

There was a mad dash to the windows and as we looked down we saw a long string of flashing lights and paddy wagons. It was a police raid.

My friend grabbed my hand and dashed us over to Paddy O’Sullivan who didn’t seemed at all perturbed by the news. “They do this to me all the time.”

I explained to Paddy that I was a Canadian and if arrested they might deport me. He just nodded sideways with his head and started to walk to a dark and almost invisible corner of the warehouse.

Paddy looked over his shoulder and when he saw no one was watching he pressed a panel in the wall and it swung open revealing a spiral staircase leading down. “This goes to the basement. If you follow the chalk lines on the wall you’ll get out fine. How are you fixed touring the sewers?”

On the landing was an old wooden crate with several well-used electric miner’s lamps. He grabbed one turned it on to check it worked and handed it to me. “You’ll need this.”

Before my friend could say anything Paddy pushed us both through and closed the panel behind us. We had only one way we could go, down the rusty old spiral staircase for the wall panel had no latch on the inside.

And so I led the way slowly down the spiral staircase, my friend clinging closely to me. “I am scared ...”

“So am I ...” I said this before I could stop myself. Perhaps I should have said something else to her to reassure her, but you can’t blame me for being honest. I was scared.

The air in the spiral staircase was dank, smoky and musty. The smoke followed us in. We slowly inched our way down the spiral. At each landing

there was a white chalk arrow on the red brick wall pointing downwards into the dark depths. Her clickety-clack now seemed comforting to me.

“How much further,” she said tremulously.

“I think we are almost to the bottom,’ and indeed we were. There in front of us appeared out of the darkness a large iron door with an equally large iron bar door latch. I pulled at it and it did not budge. It had been rusted shut.

As hard as I tried it would not budge! I put my weight on the latch and pulled, and nothing. We both put our weights on the latch and together we pushed. As if to tease us it slipped a bit and then the rust holding it fast brought it to a grinding halt. The latch was so well made that there was no clearance between the plates and rust had rendered it tight. If only we had some lubricant.

The light flickered and dimmed appreciably, as if it itself was also losing hope. “Now what?” my friend asked as she pressed herself closer to me. I could feel that she was trembling

Yes now what? I thought to myself. We were trapped ... top and bottom. The chill was starting to creep into my bones. My bladder, began to complain. I thought about the beer that I had drank and was about to curse myself for drinking it when a drastic measure crossed my mind.”

Here,” I said to my friend, “point this at the latch.” Handing her the miner’s lamp. It flickered again.

Then I aimed carefully and pissed atop the latch for a split second and then without tucking myself in I pressed against the latch and moved it a tad. Then I stepped back and took aim a second time. The second push moved the latch another few millimeters. But after three tries I had run dry ... and the latch was unseated.

I tucked myself away. "Can you lift me?" my friend inquired dauntlessly.

"Yes!" I had run dry and now it was her turn. I set the miner's lamp on the floor.

"Turn around," she said. Then I did I heard the rustling of her dress. She handed me her panties. "Hold on to these for me." I tucked them into my pocket.

Then she wrapped her arms around my neck. I knew what she needed me to do. I took one step back and heard her say "ffff ... cold." I imagined her bare backside pressed against the solid door. She placed her shoes against the door. Then there was a nearly silent whistle for a split second before she climbed off my back.

Together we worked the latch. It moved a bit more. With our faces pressed to the door the smell of pee became noticeable over the dank smoky, musty odour of the stairwell.

“Turn around again,” and we repeated the whole contortion a second time. This time she lubricated the latch for a split second longer. Then we worked it.

Almost there!

She hopped on my back a third time and let things rip until she too was spent. “Third time lucky?” she said with a giggle.

We looked into each other’s face for a split second. It was now or never. Together we pushed and pull as hard as we could ... then the latch clunked and the door swung open. The smells of the stairwell was lost in the funk of the air that forced its way in from the underground. But we didn’t mind ... we were free.

She picked up the miner’s lamp, grabbed my hand and lead the way. The miner’s lamp died that instant. She left it behind and we stepped through the door.

As we stepped into the dank underground we could see the street light streaming from the drain gratings. A few steps past the door was a ladder that led up to our freedom.

We both let out sighs of relief. “Care for some hors d’oeuvres?” She went first up the ladder and in the dim lighting of the place it was eerie how the shadows cast just above her knees. I guess I should have given her back her panties.

I followed her up the ladder and into the empty street thinking ... if only she knew how much I disliked smoked oysters!

The Ama of Onjuku

The village of Onjuku, about three hours' train ride from Tokyo, is one of the score of small villages where the men sweep the sea for the fish that is a staple commodity in Japanese diet. But its womenfolk are not the kind to weep while the men work. When the fishing-boats go to sea, Onjuku's women aged from 14 to 60 spend a full day diving for pearls, shell and edible seaweeds in the icy Pacific waters off-shore.

Work begins at sunrise, ends at sunset when the women "man-handle" their heavily timbered boats from the surf, drag them to security on the beach. The work is so laborious that divers must eat five meals a day to maintain their energy. The waters in which they hunt are so cold that they have to make frequent trips to the beach to warm their bodies by a fire. Older brothers and sisters take care of the babies while the mothers are at work.

Onjuku, the village where these half-naked women are to be found is becoming a tourist attraction.

Beginning in the 1920's the photographer Yoshiyuki Iwase (1904-2001) took photographs to record the toil and beauty of the Ama of Onjuku. Iwase was born and grew up in Onjuku. He was given his first camera at age 16.

Shigoto chu no Ama (Ama at work)





























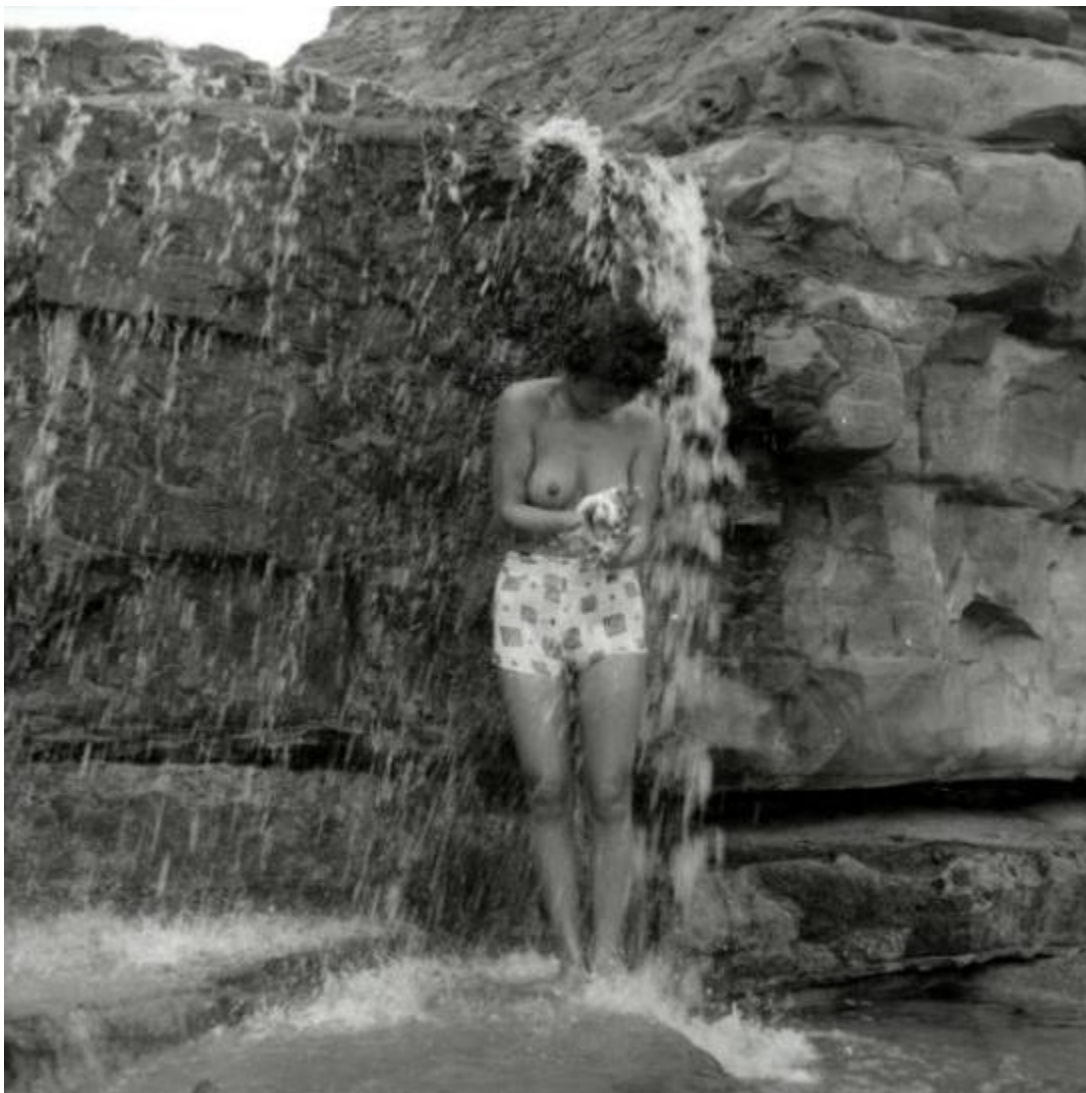












Figuratives by Iwase





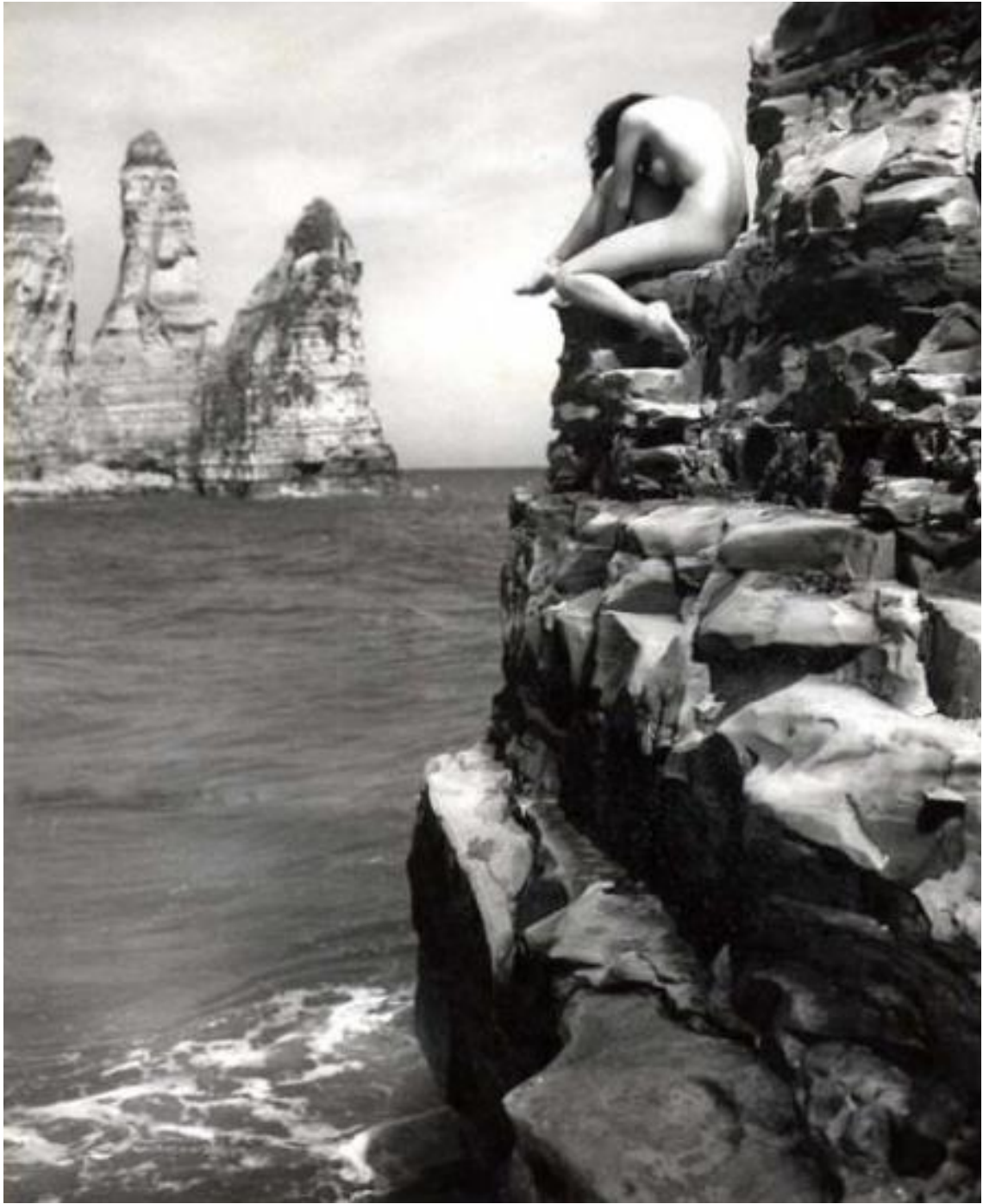














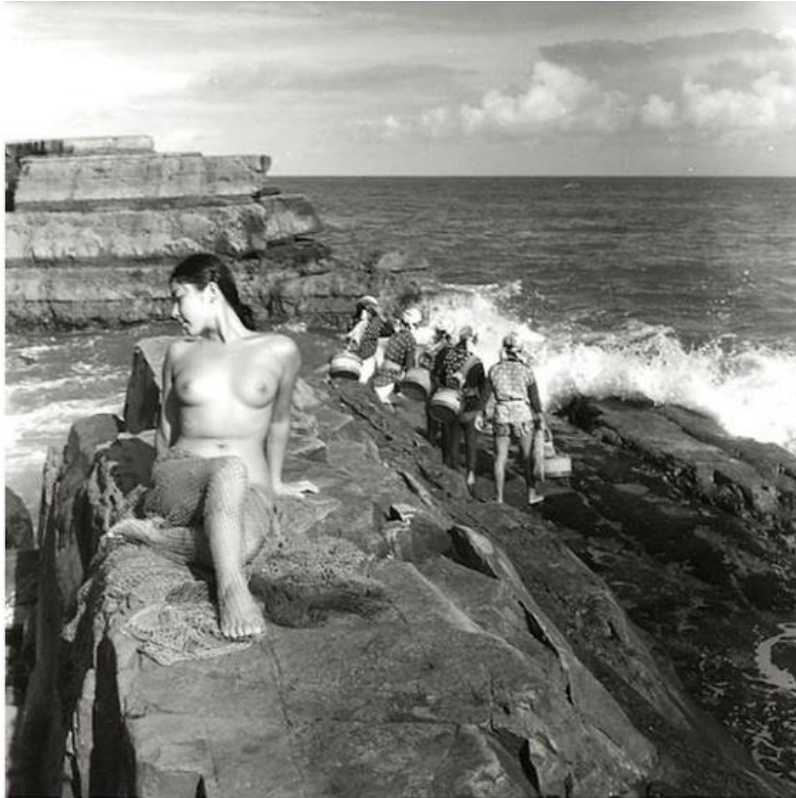
















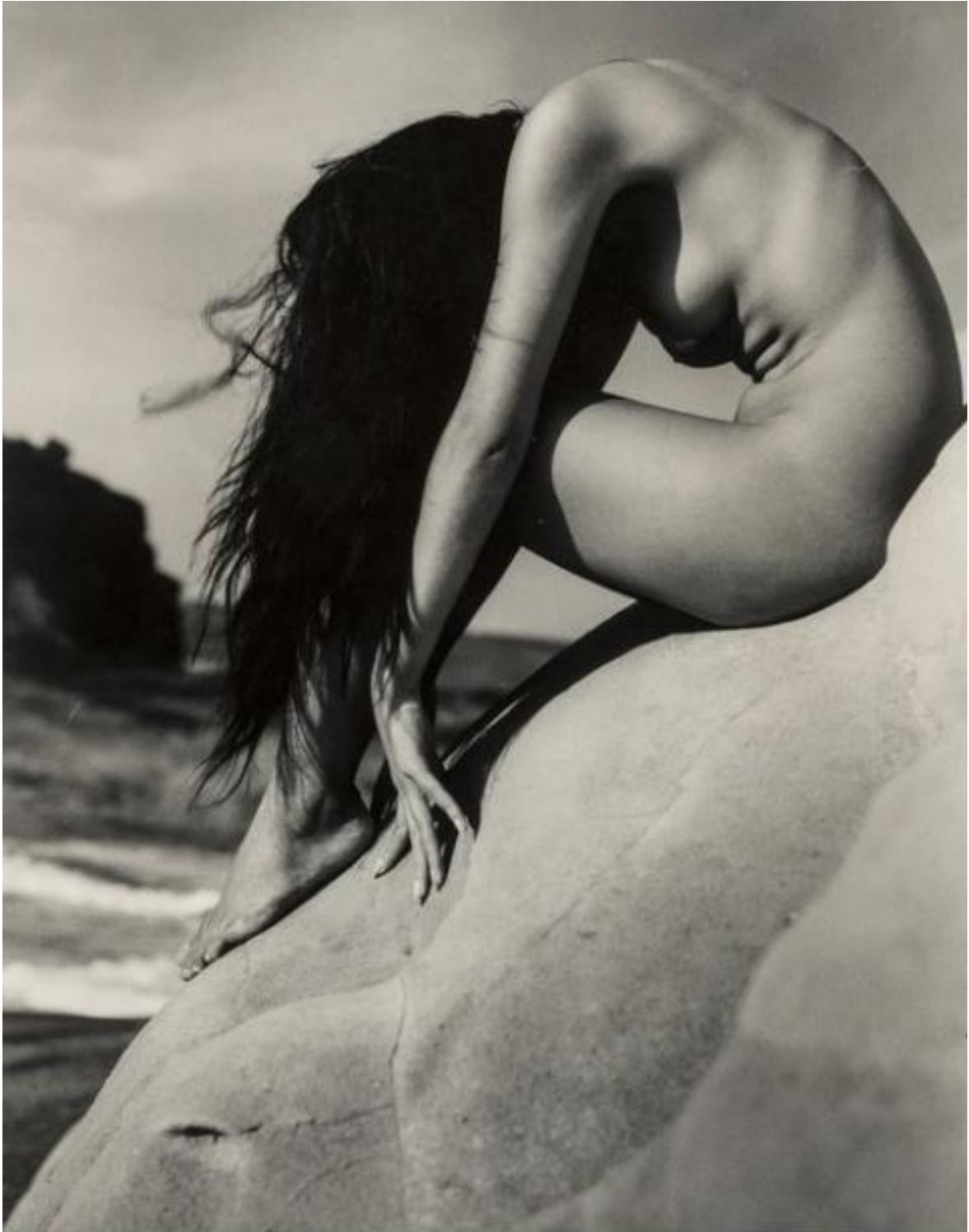














Akalako – I thought You Loved Me!



Realm of One by Patrick Bruskiewich

{Excerpt from the book *Realm of One*}

Prologue

Towards the middle of the 21st century long periods of drought had wreaked havoc on the entire continents. It was an economic strategy, planned and implemented by the Middle Kingdom, that had let loose a drought across North America and other regions of the world.

The massive disruption of the global weather systems was brought on by the rapid and unfettered industrialization in the Middle Kingdom in Asia and by their over exploitation of carbon and water resources fed to them from throughout the world.

The smog and soot released into the atmosphere by the factories and power houses of the Middle Kingdom had served as precipitation condensation seeds, which unleashed constant storms which engulfed the entire North Pacific. The Middle Kingdom's smog and soot was sown to the wind and the rest of the world had reaped the whirlwind.

The Great Pacific typhoons which began in 2020 never made it to land but let loose their precipitation over the North Pacific from the tiny, now all but desolate islands off the Middle Kingdom all the way to 2/3rds of the distance across that great ocean. There along a north-south line the rains stopped and the oceans heated. There the skies were always blue and free of clouds.

This north-south high line produced an immobile high pressure front that pushed moist air away from the North American continent and back to the west feeding the storms in the North Pacific.

As a result of this immobile and impenetrable front no rain found its way over land and in a few short years the lack of precipitation had turned massive tracts of once fertile land in North America into barren desert. With time, as the rains fell in the North Pacific, large tracts of the Indian subcontinent also dried and died off and war had ensued. A large swath of land was made inhabitable and many millions perished.

The Middle Kingdom itself was pushed east and forced to cling greedily to the coastal reaches and spill over onto the continental shelf. By their appetite for wealth and power the Middle Kingdom Mandarins had gone on to make war with their neighbours to the north, east, south and west, laying waste to the surrounding Pacific territories.

The arid western reaches of the Middle Kingdom then stopped the movement of moist air from moving east, and the rains came to the great northern Eurasian expanses. The entire Siberian expanse became an inland sea as a deluge of biblical proportions fell from the sky for years on end.

The European sub-continent remained the only fertile region that was weathering the inclement changes. But the number of people seeking sanctuary there soon exceeded the carrying capacity of the region and a series

of brief and ruthless uncivil wars had ensued. Many millions perished or were pushed back into the desolation.

The areas worst affected by the soot and smog of the Middle Kingdom was the Northern Region of the Americas. Dry winds began to blow by the first decade of the 21st century. By 2025 the once fertile wheat fields of the Americas, had dried up. Then the forests had died and entire river systems became clogged with creeping dust and sand.

In less than a dozen years, the once prosperous bread-basket of the world, the Midwest and the great prairies of North America, shrivelled away. The land had been inexorably turned into one of the world's largest desert. Each year it continued to grow.

While population in the Middle Kingdom remained stable, on the other side of the world, by 2050, half the population of North America had died of disease, starvation and uncivil violence. Millions more had died of thirst. This dystopia quickly led to food riots, and the Great Coup of 2073.

With the Great Coup the last of the Grand ideals of Democracy in the Americas had perished. By 2075 those still living in North America, struggling to survive the hunger and the thirst, envied those who had already died. There were only a handful of individuals who had the strength and the character to weather this catastrophe.

This is the story of one of them

Chapter One

The crescent moon was big and bright this night. The land was arid, desolate and prehistoric. The air was stagnant and hot. The moon shimmered in the midnight heat. This corner of hell had not seen rain for many years.

One could not know from the blowing sand that great fields of wheat that once went to the horizon in all directions once grew here. Surveying the landscape, the rolling dunes ran out in all directions for as far as the eye could see. These sombre surroundings had the smell and feel of a wasteland.

In the middle of the night a violent west wind had descended upon the parched earth. Imperceptible at first, the wind gradually grew swiftly in intensity. There was nothing to hold it back. Moment by moment, as it pushed aside the cooler moister air, the desert wind gathered strength until it swelled into a sand storm of immense ferocity.

The storm, typical for the month of ‘gust, engulfed and battered the entire plain. For what seemed like countless hours the wasteland was lifted as sheets of desert sand into the air. You could not see your hand in front of your face.

The storm had a chaotic rhythm that ebbed and flowed almost imperceptibly with time. One moment it blew with tempestuous rage. The next instant it gusted in crazy circles. Towards early morning, the wind gradually waned as it billowed away towards the horizon.

Dawn came agonizingly slow to the desert. The light crept up the eastern horizon. From a charcoal black, the sky turned first a deep blue, then vermilion and finally a crimson orange before bursting with an explosion of light that blinded you in seconds. The sun painted the desert in an intense yellow. Then the engine of massive destruction, a thermonuclear hell – the blazing sun – rose ominously above the horizon.

The radiance of the sun first swept across the crests of the dunes before marching down into the shadows. There was no escaping it. As the wind died down the sand became a textured featurelessness disturbed by faint wisps of wind and the occasional scuttling of giant armoured desert beetles.

The giant grey beetles were the first creatures to appear each dawn. Relics of a genetic experiment gone amok, the monsters were hypersensitive to motion in their surroundings and nearly indestructible.

The giant grey beetles had been bred to eat locust that once plagued the great wheat plains. With the locusts quickly eradicated, the plan was for the beetles to turn on themselves, but instead they destroyed the crops they were meant to protect, and then took to destroying the farmers meant to protect the crops.

In desperation, an arrogant biologist took it upon himself to create a virus to eradicate the giant grey beetles by poisoning them but the virus soon mutated, creating a lethal condition similar to thalassemia in humans. If you were bitten by the beast or breathed in its venom there was a hundred percent certainty

you would die. There was no known cure and the medical science that might have found a cure was no longer in existence, at least in this corner of the world.

If you were bitten by the beast or breathed in its venom death was not immediate. It would come slowly and surreptitiously. The virus attacked first your spleen and then your liver, and your blood would soon become poisoned with iron, which your body could no longer rid itself of. Then your blood would thicken and become viscous like molasses. It was a horrible way to die, if there was even a not so horrible way.

Their exoskeleton was so smooth that you could not catch them with gloved hands, and had to rely on your bare hands. If you were fast enough to catch and kill the beetle before it killed you, a knife between the hood and the armoured crest might do the trick. Otherwise they would take off a finger or your thumb and scurry off to feast, leaving you to die your slow and painful death.

If you thought a bullet or plasma jet would do the trick, beware not to breath in its green blood as an aerosol for the airborne virus was more lethal than the liquid borne one. A cross between a desert scorpion and common Japanese garden beetle if they saw you coming and knew their life was at stake they would spite in your face, or sent a jet of their venomous bodily fluid into the air for you to breath.

It had only taken them a handful of years to wreck their havoc. Now they could now survive the extremes of heat and cold found in the deserts.

The beetles had become the garbage collectors of the desert. What the sand and wind had not buried the beetle was sure to consume. They survived on the paltry remnants left by the cycle of predation in this unforgiving environment. When there was nothing to eat, they preyed on each other. Now only the largest, fastest and most ferocious survived.

They only feared one or two other creatures, one small and one less so.

Beneath the surface a creature began to sense the heat around it. During the frigid desert nights this predator slept. During the early morning and late evenings if caught in the desert it stalked its prey. A cold-blooded hunter, it needed the hellish desert sun to survive.

Far to the lee of a large dune a rattler pushed aside the sand blocking the entrance to its burrow. The snake poked its head out and tasted the air with its tongue before it slithered out. It was near sighted but nonetheless scanned the sky for any sign of a winged raptor, for although it was the hottest month of its year, death could still come swooping down in the blink of an eye.

The snake's protection was its senses, quickness and as a last resort its venom. It knew to not waste its venom in such a dry climate, for want of a true need to protect itself. To waste the venom would mean several days of vulnerability as its spit was replenished in the arid desert.

The rattler was also protected by its colour, a motley camouflage that matched its surroundings, and the slow, measured and deliberate way in which it moved across the desert. It had fought and won many battles but that didn't keep the snake from being cautious. Experience had taught it that stealth and vigilance guaranteed its survival.

The rattler rocked its head from side to side, flicking its tongue. Its olfactory system sensed neither predator nor prey. With only one fang it had not been too lucky as of late. The other fang it left in the leg of a large creature that had gotten away.

The snake prowled off in search of a meal. It knew that unless it soon found food starvation was only a few days away. Within mere seconds it had disappeared into the shimmering morning.

A breeze whispered across the arid plain blowing a miniature cloud before it. A giant beetle, alerted by its genetically engineered acute sense of smell, now aware of the danger of the approaching snake, stopped and stood immobile as the rattler slithered by.

Just a short distance away a finger pierced the crust of the sand, then several more, until a knarled hand materialized. Five thin black fingers stretched towards the sky, flexing as if coming to life for the very first time. More of the crust broke into pieces like a prehistoric egg and an arm emerged from the sand, then a shoulder then a covered and protected head.

A gold mask wearily turned to face the rising sun. Sand had blasted deep scratches across the once smooth surface of the faceplate. The early morning glare mirrored off the creature's face.

It next struggled out of the earth and into the bright yellow dawn sitting on the corner of the hole. It rocked its head from side to side and shrugged its shoulder and stretched. Slowly, deliberately the creature placed a hand over the faceplate to block out the sun and scanned the horizon.

The humanoid lifted itself out of the ground, and dusted sand off itself with the back of a hand. Then it kneeled on one knee, peered down into the hole, and reached down to lift out a small sack before slinging it over its left shoulder.

It extracted a pair of battered binoculars from the pouch and scanned its surrounding carefully. Then it spotted motion it was looking for, and slowly crouched extracting a pistol from the pouch on its side. It lifted the pistol and extended a shoulder stock, flicked sand off the sights and began to track an object across the dune. The shot, when it came left no echo. A puff of sand marked its impact. There was a spasm then the distant motion stopped.

Before it walked away from its warren the homonoid squatted and opened a small flap in her skin before setting a short drizzle of yellow, pungent liquid into the burrow. It marked its warren to keep the creatures of the desert from

moving in, then closed the small flap and stood up. The creatures of the desert now knew to stay clear of this place.

She covered the opening of the warren with a piece of shiny material then patted sand carefully over the cover. The last thing the homonoid did was mark the opening with an equilateral triangle made up of three handfuls of sand. To a trained eye the mark would be visible, to the untrained eye, invisible

The humanoid then stood up and then began to carefully walk across the crests of the dunes until it came to its prey, the dead snake splayed across the sand. She had hit it squarely between its eyes.

A giant beetle was already feasting on its cadaver by the time the homonoid lifted the snake by the tail and gave it a good flick. The beetle's pincer was hooked into the cadaver. The beetle had to crush underfoot before it let go of the cadaver.

The humanoid tied the snake to a length of rope and dragged it behind itself as it began to walk towards the north. The humanoid walked faster than the beetles could give chase. Together, with the beetle in intermittent chase, trekked on for several hours. Eventually the giant beetle stopped giving chase and began to expire in the desert sun. The homonoid backtracked and turned the beetle over. As the sun began to back its belly, the beetle struggled frantically to right itself. The homonoid picked up some sand and let it drop from its hand to gauge the direction of the wind.

The homonoid moved a few steps back and upwind from the struggling beetle. Then with a giant pop the beetle spew its inwards in a death spasm in the sand around its final resting place. Then the homonoid gathered several handful of sand to cover the mess.

The homonoid spent a few minutes looking back along the footsteps it had left in the sand. The footsteps continued for a great distance merging with the shimmering horizon. The steady easterly desert wind was already filling the most recent steps with sand. The homonoid turned to continue on its trek.

The humanoid stopped only once more, to observe from a distance a giant anthropoid. It slowly crouched and lay on the sand studying the anthropoid with its binoculars. Then it scanned the entire horizon for movement.

When it was convinced it was safe to proceed, the humanoid stood and continued its trek towards the giant structure.

By the time the homonoid had arrived at its destination the snake it had trailed behind had baked in the desert sun and was ready to be eaten. All that was required was to separate its outer skin from its succulent inside.

The anthropoid's shiny surface was covered in the fine dust of the mid-Western plains. As the humanoid approached it, this enormous machine loomed over the diminutive biped. A glare with the blinding light of the rising

sun, the machine's massive photovoltaic panels made it appear like a giant winged insect.

In the shadow of the machine, the humanoid stopped and hung the now desiccated snake on a small metal protuberance. With well-practiced finesse the creature began to draw its five fingers from a glove. It removed one glove, then the other before tucking them both in its belt.

The two hands had fragile, diminutive and soft fingers. The finger nails were well tended and were strangely out of place given the fierceness harshness of the surroundings. The small hand next grappled behind its helmet to unclip the gold faceplate. The humanoid lifted off its helmet and freed its head of fiery red hair.

Cynthia 123 took her first breathes of unprocessed desert air in several hours. She coughed. Unlike the moist, cool air processed by the molecular sieve in her envirosuit, the unprocessed desert air was nearly completely arid. She looked up, and although she stood in the shadow of the machine, she knew the sky held the promise of another hellish day.

No matter how long I am exiled here, she thought, I shall never get use this place.

She stretched her arms above her head and arched her back. She had many times curled into a ball and burrowed into a subterranean warren to escape a ferocious desert storm.

An old and wise nomad had taught her how to bury into the sand to protect herself from the sudden and unforgiving perils of the desert. This priceless knowledge had saved her life countless times when pirateers, predators and desert storms had threatened her existence.

Cynthia 123 knew, given her arduous life, she was fortunate she was still agile and flexible, for her advancing age, and the desert had begun to take its toll on her.

She extracted a knife from its scabbard and in a swift slice cut the rattler's tail off. She held it up to ear and shook it. She smiled. Well, she thought, at least four years old. She would have animal protein for dinner today.

Cynthia 123 turned to assess the state of the giant metallic anthropoid. The machine and its shadow gave the desert landscape an air of surrealism.

The massive, self-contained structure existed for one purpose, and one purpose only – as she existed for only a singular purpose – to produce life giving water to the Guild. The giant metallic anthropoid was a giant water condenser built in the shape of a giant wasp.

Each day the massive thin-film composite graphene solar panels produced electricity. Each night the stored electricity was used to produce water by a controlled diffusion through absorbent nanotube composites of the arid desert air, followed by a purge of refrigerated dry nitrogen from which the water was

condensed out. The water, in turn, was stored away, locked deep inside the machine in immense reservoirs. The whole machine was called a condenser – even though condensation was only the last step of a remarkable simple process.

The absorbent nanotube composites had been a genetically engineered derivative from spider's silk, with a hydrophilic protein engineered in.

Underneath the condenser and for a hundred feet in all directions around it a series of giant reservoirs had been built over the years for the collected water. The condenser had robots whose programming was to continue to build copies of themselves and new water reservoirs using carbon extracted from the air and silicates from the sand which they processed into a brick that was strong and lightweight – more like a froth than a solid.

The robots cut and stack the bricks into a cylindrical structure that was then filled full of water. This was all buried away under the sand. If you did not know it was there you would not notice this save for the coolness of the sand above the great body of subterranean reservoir.

The condenser itself stood solitary and tall against the desert landscape. Its shape and design spoke of practicality and precision. The hyper-thin film solar panels made of grapheme photovoltaics hung like giant gossamer wings, belying their inherent strength. Protuberances and piping marked the entire length of the machine.

It was hard to gauge the age of the machine. From a distance it look relatively new. Close up it looked older and somewhat worn out. It was definitely older than she was.

The uncontrolled burning of carbon fuels by the Middle Kingdoms of Asia released such massive amounts of soot and smog that the rain patterns in the North Pacific was altered and the entire North America continent had been turned fallen into drought and then became a giant desert.

When it became apparent what was happening efforts were made to try to reverse the process. But large scale water diversions from the northern reaches of North America had failed.

Then more modern science suggested an alternative. The giant water condensers were built when ecological and economic desperation could still be answered by technological effort. When they were first built the condensers stood at the centre of sprawling communities. As the desert crept in the communities died and the people moved, leaving the condensers behind in the middle of nowhere. Then the desert over took the abandoned cities.

The water condensers had once been completely white, painted with titanium dioxide paint to alleviate the damage of UV on its exoskeletons. Over many years the ferocious desert winds had chipped away the paint, leaving only a patina that gave the machines an almost life like skin.

Cynthia 123 look upwards and she examined the machine. She was miniscule next to her mechanical ward. She set her ear against its side, closed her eyes and listened intently. The wind whistle softly but she ignored the higher frequencies. Her hearing was so acute that she could sense the state of the myriads of automated pumps, valves and actuators, almost as well as the condenser's onboard computers.

She smiled. The machine's dull, rhythmic oscillations told her that the condenser had weathered the storm. The machine had a soul of its own, she thought. At times it ran smoothly, uncaringly, and at other times it shuddered as if to plead for Cynthia 123's attention. At night, she sometimes set herself down to be lulled to sleep by the rocking and cadenced motion of its giant scroll compressors.

She pulled sunglasses out of her pouch and put on a bright orange hat, tucked the edge of the hat into her collar before stepping out of the shadow. She walked around the giant machine, carefully assessing its many protuberances and panels. The solar panels were partially covered by sand. She would either rotate the panels to dust the sand off, or let the wind carry the sand away. Or she might use some of the precious water to wash the panels off. It was so hot that it wasn't much of a wash – more like a steam cleaning – of the grapheme solar panels.

Other than that, the condenser seemed to have weathered the storm without any obvious or new external damage, not that she expected any damage for the machine had weathered more ferocious storms than last night's tempest.

Whatever its state, as its “keeper”, Cynthia 123 was there to care for it, to make sure it continued producing its valuable water. Once a month a heavily armed WATPOL hovercraft dispatched by the Guild was scheduled to come to retrieve the bounty. But then that had slipped to every two months, then every six and finally periodically several times in a long time.

They would arrive unannounced. Cynthia 123 knew to hide away when the men came, for she sensed they would come looking for more than just the water. She never tested her assumption, but she knew she was wise to be careful. They had given up looking for her, for she was so tiny she could hide in places they would never think of looking.

Besides they needed her and it was in their best interest to leave her be! The precious water she produced kept thousands of people alive at settlements and prison encampments to the southeast where citizens struggled to stay alive and a growing number of state criminals toiled in the futile forced desertification program begun under the last civilian government. The Guild sprung from Home-Sec, a program whose original purpose had long been forgotten.

The precious water was important in another way too. When the fossil fuels became scarce in North America towards the year 2050, hydrogen sol-electrolized from the water, became the primary fuel of the state. For the state, control of the hydrogen resource became doubly important, as fuel for the

large WATPOL fleet of tanks, helicopters, hovercraft and other surface vehicles.

The Guild knew the power of water: They knew that whomever controlled the fresh water resources of the water would control the World itself.

Before the Great Coup of '73 the water compressors were operated by paid employees – all freemen. When the Guild overthrew the last civilian government, the technicians disappeared, to be replaced by SPEPs – the “*Special Prisoners*”.

At the time of the Great Coup there were dozens of condensers in operation across the mid-West, producing millions of tonnes of water each month. With the passage of time, and the lack of proper maintenance, the numbers shrank. Today there was just a handful still in operation.

Cynthia 123 was a SPEP. She knew her job and did it well. They knew to leave her alone.

Cynthia 123 finished her inspection of the outside of the condenser. She was covered head to foot in fine desert sand and before she entered the machine she dusted the outside of her envirosuit with the back of her hand.

Once inside, Cynthia 123 reached down to unseam herself from her artificial skin. Her knarled envirosuit, made of engineered layers of graphene organo-composite, was a self-contained enclave against the harsh environment,

impervious to storm, heat and UV radiation. Without it she would not be able to survive the desert for more than a few hours.

These envirosuits were invented for use of Mars, when extraplanetary exodus and colonization was being considered. The Guild ended all that and so the suits ended up finding their greatest use here in the arid desert.

The seam down the right side of the suit parted with the slightest effort. As she stripped the suit off she marvelled at its scintillating beauty and its soft touch. The envirosuit provided her with a skin tight covering yet at a millimetre thick had room for hundreds of micron thin layers of active and intelligent nanomachinery.

Cynthia 123 owed much of her existence to a mysterious nomad who happened upon her soon after her servitude began when she was twelve. The nomad had given her this prized gift in exchange for a periodic supply of her precious water. When he had given her the suit he said it would give her great strength and wisdom. Now she was seventeen and over the last five years, as she grew the suit somehow grew with her.

It had the remarkable feature of morphing as she grew, almost as if the envirosuit anticipated all her changes before they happened. It also kept her body smooth and free of hair, in a self-depilation that made her appear much younger than she really was. Because of the tight fitting nature of the envirosuit she understood why this was being done, but at times she thought it rather amusing.

On the occasion she set her envirosuit aside and decided to just enjoy the freedom of not wearing it, she would sprout fuzz on the most intimate of places. An hour's wearing of the envirosuit, and with a barely perceptible tickle, the fuzz was gone.

Cynthia 123 didn't know much about the suit. She marvelled at its scintillating beauty. She didn't know that the envirosuit material was made of a three-dimensional weave of carbon polymers, graphene and diamond composites. All she knew was these beautiful fibres made the suit stronger than steel.

She did not know that her second skin was a body-conforming, nanocomputer which included artificial muscles powered by microelectronic stepper motors embedded in its micro-thin layers. The whole mechanism was powered by a microlayer of composite graphene that drew electricity from the light of its surroundings. When not in use she would sometimes recharge the mechanism by hanging it in the mid-day sun.

The heart of the mechanism was a dynamic nanocomputer of immense intellect that enveloped every curve and recess of her body. The intelligent nanomachinery gave the envirosuit material its strength and versatility, making it stretch, contract and bend to the whim of its wearer. Even the softness and colour of the material was programmable.

Cynthia 123 once stopped a plasma jet wearing her suit and while the kick threw her several metres and bruised several ribs, the fibres of her suit were not even scratched. The nanocomputer had reconfigured itself to compensate for the jolt done to its microprocessors. Through its internal repair algorithms, the suit did not show any damage.

As she studied it and caressed it she knew the suit was alive. The nomad on subsequent visits had taught her to use her thoughts to talk with the suit. It was tuned directly into her brain. The nomad had programmed the suit and then taught her how to converse telepathically with her suit. She was both surprised and thrilled when the suit talked back to her the first time, almost as a living and breathing person would talk to a friend.

The suit was a living encyclopaedia of wisdom, knowledge and culture. Here in the desert, in the middle of nowhere it had been her teacher and had kept her alive. It was he that kept her sane.

She peeled away her outer skin to expose her bare, inner skin. She was not very tall, just one metre sixty-five, and thin for her age. She had small breasts and small hips. ...

As she hung it up to air the suit spoke to her “Are you taking me off?”

She smiled. “That’s pretty obvious don’t you think?”

It showed a little annoyance in its next words. “Your body temperature is down point two-seven degrees this morning. Please take care you do not stay in too long this morning. We do expect visitors in three point two five hours.”

“I want to sit outside for a while. Will you keep watch?” She knew to sit in the shadow of the machine, near the portal.

“Yes. External sensors are on line and functioning nominally. I think I will play several games of chess. I am studying the *Bruskiewich Variation*”

Cynthia 123 felt safe now that she was back home. “Good I wouldn’t want to be surprised by any unannounced visitors.”

A wisp of arid desert air blew a strand of her hair across her face. She brushed the strand back into place with her right hand. As she sat she looked down at the ground. Fine grains of sand were dancing in the ebb and flow of the morning wind. Sand was slowly piling up against her bare feet.

She watched as a rose coloured grain of sand tumble across the ground. It seemed much smaller and prettier than the other grains. She thought of how it must be for a grain of sand to be at the mercy of the wind. She thought how it must be to be at the mercy of anything.

After five years in the desert her skin still remained as supple as it was the day they exiled her to the desert. Such a healthy and beautiful girl hardly looked like a hardened criminal. Yet she was a SPEP.

Cynthia 123 got up, lifted the suit off the protuberance and walked through the portal. The door closed swiftly and efficiently behind her. It did not make a sound as it locked shut. In her bare feet she walked down a long corridor with gray pipes and conduits, all marked in fading letters.

As she walked away from the portal she could feel the air become cooler and moist. Her skin came alive with goose bumps. She did not mind her breast responding to the coolness of the air. It did not embarrass her, besides she was alone. Why should she care?

At the end of the corridor another portal opened and she stepped into an immense chamber as the centre of which was a giant and deep holding pool brimming with water. As she walked at its edge she bent down and ran her hand through the inviting water. It was cold, and this sent a shiver down her spine. The colder the better she thought.

She set her envirosuit down on the floor and sat down beside it and began to rub her left arm. As a force of habit she hoped that by rubbing often enough the number tattooed under her left arm would wear off with time.

Crouching with her back against the cold stainless steel of the chamber she caressed her aching knees. To crouch in her subterranean warren for hours and then to walk many hours seemed a small price to pay for the meat the snake would provide her. The snakes kept far away from humans and their machinery.

Cynthia 123 grew a wide variety of vegetables and fruit, but still craved meat from time to time. That's why she ventured so far into the desert in search of meat.

She once bagged a bird, but that was a lucky shot and proved disappointing in that the bird was thin and old had barely any meat on it. She knew, from experience, to go after the rattlers. They always seemed well fed. The snakes knew, as well, to go after her. Besides the thrill of the kill exhilarated her, as much as the thought that was prey for an adversary.

"Why do you do this each morning? You are only hurting your skin."

She snapped back, "I thought you were playing chess."

"I find the *Bruskiewich Variation* too complicated. I need a break. He was a super chess player."

She said nothing and so he continued. "Do you mind that I ask? I have watched you do this nearly every morning. The mark can only be lifted off through laser incision."

She continued to ignore him and stared at her tattoo. She knew he was right, but that didn't stop her. Every morning, it was her ritual to rub at the symbols and remember. As she rubbed all that brought her here came back to her as vividly as if it had happened only yesterday.

On the eve of her twelfth birthday she had been arrested and tried for crimes against the state – “for stealing aqueous resources” from the reservoir outside of new Vegerville.

The Guild normally executed SPEP for the crime of WATTHEFT, but she was lucky. She was the few that legends are made from.

Their usual punishment, the only one the Guild seemed to mettle out to prisoners guilty of WATTHEFT, was death. Not a quick and merciful death mind you, the Guild knew no such retribution, but a slow, agonizing and painful death.

The condemned was stripped, forced fed salt water before being smeared with silicon gel and pegged to the ground in the baking sun. The silicon guaranteed a slow cook, a stewing of the condemned in their own fluids. The salt water emptied the condemned bladder and swelled the victim’s throat to stifle their screams.

The prisoners were driven insane by the sun before they died. Most did not last more than a few days. All were forced to bear witness to the punishment, which occurred on the first and on the middle days of the month, and on those months were thirst got the better of more, on the added days in between. The punishment was the Guild’s way to terrorize the populace into submission.

The public was forced to walk past the condemned on their way through the centre of town. As deterrence, the carcass was left to melt away and the pitiful bones left to bleach in the sun for all to see. Many chose to take the circuitous route around the town to avoid the gruesome sight.

There were other crimes that saw punishment. Cynthia 123 once watched a SPEP put to death. The victim, a boy she knew was chattel for a large household, was slated to be rendered. A male slave could remain whole only until the onset of puberty. Then they were rendered.

The night before his rendering, the boy had climbed the wall and set off to the west. He got no further than a day's journey before he was caught. He knew the risk and knew the consequence.

His punishment was immediate. He was set to the pegs, rendered and then left to bleed to death. From time to times in her nightmares, his cries for mercy still rang out in Cynthia 123's ears.

For a moment she paused in her remembrances and looked up. The hollow boom of the main compressor filled the chamber with its power. It ran on a low voltage starter, which caused the hollow boom when the machine started. Then she felt a slight tremor as the machine picked up in speed and smiled.

She smiled. All was well. She went back to her thoughts.

She found herself staring in the distance, thinking how lucky she was. For many months the WATPOL had known that a young girl was swimming in the state reservoir. They had searched high and low for her yet, despite the reach of their technology, were never able to catch her. They tried many times to ensnare her but somehow she would outwit them at every turn.

They used hypersensitive atmospheric chromatographs to try to smell her out. Her pheromones told them that they were looking for a prepubescent girl. They used acoustic discriminators to measure her steps and follow her tracks. That's how they knew she was young. They used cryogenically cooled selenium oxide imagers to take pictures of her at a great distance at night. That's how they knew that she swam in the reservoir, and stole sips of water while she swam.

It frustrated the WATPOL to no ends.

Foolishly, she thought it was a game. Like a tiny shrew she would be in their sensor fields one moment and disappear into the night in the next.

What they didn't know was that every time she swam she also drank and every time she left the reservoir, she took some of the water back with her, which carried as urine became a valuable commodity which kept her and her mother fed. She would empty herself in a solar still and by the same afternoon they had a litre or more of fresh water.

Her mother and her used this water to meet their gardening needs and what was left over was bartered for things they needed. This had gone on for many intriguing months.

As word of her escapades leaked out, the legend grew in New Vegerville of a defiant “little one.” As legends go hers grew to such heights that she became their treasured symbol of non-violent defiance.

Through no choice of her own she had become their heroine, the focus of their struggle against the misery and oppression of the Guild and the WATPOL. All she was trying to do, like everyone else, was survive.

It was not her actions but her legend that made her so dangerous to the Guild, for as her legend grew so too did the embarrassment of the Guild. Just as they were being debated in every corner of first the town, then the region, then the territory, her exploits were also be discussed and dissected for their socio-political implications at the highest strategic levels of the Guild.

The omnipotence and prestige of the Guild was being challenged – and by a twelve year old girl. If a “little one” could defy them, they feared that similar acts of defiance, and even full scale rebellions, would spread without check within their realm.

The Guild could not accept that they stood defied by the action of a “little one.” They also knew that once caught she could not be set as an example in the usual sense.

Around the subject of the “little one”, factions split within the established order. Alliances formed and balances swayed as her exploits were argued in minute detail. Finally two contending factions prevailed. Stamp her out and erase her memory some counselled. Dead legends fade away they contended.

The other view was that this would only make her a martyr, and the Guild could not afford the risk. While dead legends do not talk, their followers keep dead legends alive. They argued that she needs to be found, tried and made to fade away into oblivion, but “expiration is not to be inflicted” they cautioned.

Ultimately, after many months of secretive deliberation, the decree was duly drafted, duly signed and counter signed at all levels of the Guild and then duly issued. The “little one” was to be captured alive and unharmed, they would have to deal with her as a SPEP and exile her. The exile would be to a condenser, an irony not lost on the dominant faction.

Whatever they wanted, they did not want to elevate her into martyrdom. Only they had the right to make heroes, and then only loyal ones. “Whoever captured the little one would be made a hero” the Guild decreed.

Once captured, her punishment would be made public and she would be made an example of the power of the Guild and the futility of revolt.

At the time Cynthia 123 was too young to understand the dimensions and consequence of her actions let alone the effect it was having on the socio-political balance of power.

After all, all she was doing was sneaking in for a midnight swim and a few gulps of water. Perhaps she should have known better, but in her youthfulness she had a naïve sense of the dangers that awaited her.

She kept her actions from everyone, except her mother. It was too hot to venture forth during the day. Her mother knew not to ask her what she did at night ... only that she be careful. Her mother could understand her actions. It went beyond her age or their circumstances. It went beyond the little town they were trapped in.

Cynthia 123 was very close to her mother, who looked after her as best as she could. Her mother was a baker's assistant, which meant they sometimes had food on their table even when others went hungry.

Her defiance grew from the memory of her father, a memory so blurred by time that Cynthia 123 could no longer separate the facts from the fiction she created of him. She had let her imagination play out so the in her measure, her father was larger than life, a mythical figure that had fought the Guild at every quarter.

Her father's fight, in her sense of things, was a fight not of guns but of wits, for after all her father had been a great scientist. He had made a difference in

the world, when a difference could still be made by a single man. He had made a difference in the world not by those he could hurt but by those he could help.

Her mother no longer talked about him. Yet even with the passage of time her sorrow surrounding his sudden and unexplained disappearance did not diminish. “They forced him away”, she said. “Free he was a threat the Guild could not endure. His brilliance would eventually topple them.”

Her father was a wise, and principled man who to protect his family, packed a satchel and marched into the desert. The wind buried his tracks and no trace of him was ever found. They searched all over for him but somehow he had managed to elude them. Even Cynthia 123 could not connect the memory of her father with the nomad that sought her out and gave her the envirosuit.

At one point the Guild told her mother that he had not survived, but Cynthia 123 knew her father was made of sterner stuff. If they had captured him they wouldn’t have killed him to begin with, but in slavery he would have died, not perhaps physically but surely in spirit. Her father once told her that a person with a dead spirit is worst than death itself.

Cynthia 123 knew she owed it to her father to right the evil she saw around her. She would make a difference in the world, like her father ... not in those she could hurt but instead by those she could help. If caught she would plead the folly of youth. For their own clear and decreed reasons the Guild would not plead compassion.

For many months the game continued. She would sneak in at night. They would give chase. She would elude. She miraculously escaped capture ... until one fateful day.

Against any better judgement. She had invited her best friend into her nocturnal secret. Her friend Anna 125, was a few years younger. Blond with green eyes, she looked like a trustworthy friend and out of place amongst all the brown eye ragamuffins. The two had become instant friends and had grown up together.

Although times had been harsh, the two had managed to share many happy hours together exploring the grottos and forgotten corners of the town. They also found many hiding places and underground passageways around the town. The dust, dirt and grim didn't bother them.

They also know where to find exciting things, long abandoned. Strange things that once had rubber wheels and doors, but the machines had been stripped entirely bare of anything valuable or negotiable. There were hundreds of these strange machines rusting away all over the town.

Cynthia 123 and her closest friend played together, read together and shared the intimacy of two kindred spirits. Together they dreamed of a future with the return of rain, of plentiful water, of green lush fields (it was rare they saw anything green).

And they dreamed of “Freedom”, a word that Cynthia 123 had repeatedly heard from her father. It should have been a warning that Anna 125’s father was a poorly paid low level functionary in the Guild. Anna 125’s mother was a mid-wife and had delivered Cynthia 123. But in the end, her friendship with Anna 125 seemed straightforward and innocent enough.

She was shocked to find out at her sentencing (no trial was forthcoming for SPEPs like her) that her best friend was a WATPOL informant who rolled on her best friend and turned her in.

The fateful night they appeared with bright lights and horses. She could not hide in the darkness of the night. She tried to out run them but the horses were too fast. She tried to out fox them but they seemed to know what she would do next.

She tried to escape by one of her few secret routes, but they were all blocked by the robotic hounds. No matter which way she turned they were there waiting for her – men on foot, men on horseback and with the hounds. Their robotic hounds could see in both the visible and the infrared, and they had programmable olfactory sensors ten times more sensitive than real hounds.

The WATPOL had obviously planned ahead, and she had been lulled into a false sense of security. Before she realized that her familiarity with the place had made her complacent they set on her. She gave them a good chase but it was just a matter of time before the horsemen caught her. They chased her for over an hour before, in sheer exhaustion, she could flee no longer.

They chased Cynthia 123 the length of the reservoir and as she back tracked there was a few seconds of confusion as the force of horsemen folded back and rode in their midst. She took the momentary confusion as a chance to roll in the mud and then bury herself in the thick oozing slime.

For several minutes the horseman frantically searched. She heard one of them shout “she could not have gone far.” He evidently was in charge.

She watched him closely as he circled about and rode towards her. He did not seem angry. In a sense, he seemed merely professional. He handled his horse with one hand on the reins and directed his men with his other hand. His words were not yelled, they were merely spoken with an authority that boomed through the night. Cynthia 123 guessed that if he were asked he would merely say to her he was doing his job, and his job was to catch her, nothing more.

Her lungs were bursting from the effort of her run. Her heart was beating so fast she could barely hear anything else but its hammering. Her head was about to explode. In a slow and measured way she caught her breath. Now that she was stationary, she seemed less worried, although the danger was a mere gallop away.

As her breath returned to normal, a new challenge confronted her. It was the green and brown ooze she had hid herself in. The stench of the decaying

organic material in the mud was causing her to gag but she forced the vomit back down her throat.

She would have escaped detection but as the lead horseman got close to where she lay and his horse was to step on her. The horse sensed she was there but she didn't realize that until it was too late. She flinched. Not much, only a hoof's width, but that slight flinch was all it took.

The lead horseman saw her and swiftly leapt off his horse. He almost landed on top of her. She pushed him over and started to run. She heard him fall and curse. The mud made everything slippery. She scrambled towards the water edge. A strong pair of arms grabbed her, but slipped off. The grab knocked her off her feet.

She fell head first into the mud and started to retch. Still she didn't give up. She crawled on all fours but then started to vomit. It was then she realized she had to stop. If she didn't, she would choke on her own vomit.

The horseman let her throw up ... retching once, twice and then a third time. Then they were upon her. In her weakened and pitiful state she still fought them though and got to the water's edge but now they surrounded her on all four sides.

The lead horseman spoke to her. "Come on little one. There is nowhere to run." She circled around her with arms extended.

The lead horseman took a step closer to her and spoke again. “I have orders to catch you ... and I want to bring you back alive and whole.” Cynthia 123 didn’t cringe at the thought of dying ... it was the other thought, that of living a crippled and painful life.

She slowly let down her arms. The lead horseman ordered his men not to cause her harm. Then the men on foot arrived and set upon her. She punched and kicked but there was just too many of them.

When they finally overwhelmed her she was bedraggled in front of the pose, still bare, covered from head to toe in mud, and dripping from both the water she had run through and her own sweat.

They started to laugh. What a pitiful sight. To them she was just another capture. One of many. It was clear she no longer wished fight them. The lead horseman stepped forward and sternly took her arm. Her arm was fragile and frail compared to the muscles in his arm. He held her wrist firmly, flicked the mud off with his finger, then squirted a thick, gooey, green liquid over the exposed skin on her arm and then jabbed her with a epi-syringe.

Although she was now cooperating (she knew best to do this) they nonetheless tranquilized her with an injection. As they did this Cynthia 123 knew what to expect. She had seen the WATPOL do this to prisoners. The WATPOL had long ago discovered the efficiency of drugs in controlling their prisoners.

Her heart was still beating and adrenaline still racing through her body that the injection took only a few seconds to take effect. She was conscious of what was going on around her, yet calm and numb. She slowly lost the strength in her legs and sank to the ground.

It was only then that they bound her wrists, and then her ankles with rough rope. The lead horseman removed a bandana from around his neck and gagged her. The bandana tasted of salty sweat and dust. As he did up the bandana he looked into her eyes and strangely she felt vulnerable yet safe at the same time.

He lifted her and heaved her across the back of his horse and then mounted for the long ride back to New Vegerville. In a state of fading consciousness she watched the dark ground pass under her as the horse made its journey back to town. He could feel his hand on her backside, steadying her as the horse swayed back and forth. He had removed his gloves and so she could feel his skin against hers. And the warmth. His warm hand was reassuring.

As they rode into New Vegerville she had visions of her being staked to the ground under the blazing sun. Her anxiety was not for herself, since she saw no hope for escape. Her apprehension was for her mother and how lonely she would be once Cynthia 123 was gone.

This apprehension, though, could not keep her awake as the injection dragged her first into stupor, then sleep, then nightmares.

As she swayed back and forth the snorting of the horses mixed with the surrealism of her nightmares. She was being chased by creatures hell bent on devouring her. Over and over she tried to flee, but over and over they caught her and, like Saturn and its young, chewed her to bits as she remained conscious through the whole. Try as she must she could never escape the creatures nor escape from her nightmare.

When they entered New Vegerville soon after dawn she was awoken by a harsh slap to her backside from the lead horseman. She screamed and started to tilt headfirst off the horse. He grabbed her shoulder and someone grabbed her bound legs and manhandled her off the horse.

She could not stand by herself. The mud had by now hardened all over her body, save on her belly and breasts which had pressed against the saddle on the horse, and one or two more intimate places which had been kept moist by her sweat.

Supported on one side by the tired horse and on the other side by the tired horseman her ankles were untied. The guard let go of her. She crumpled to the ground and sat silent for several minutes while the fog lifted from inside her head. Her legs were pins and needles as the circulation was restored. She reeked of her sweat, the sweat of the horse, and the remnant of the foul mud.

To add to her misery she was now covered from head to foot with a white layer of fine clay and dust, caked on by sweat. Her hair was a tangle of

branches and mud. During the night her body had been scratched by the small bushes the horse had wondered through in their trek back.

The injection had caused a terrible headache that had been made worst by the rough handling as she lay across the saddle on the horse. The constant bumping had so weaken her kidneys that nature took its course. She urinated where she sat. The horse stared down at her and humphed. She looked up and saw that the horse had turned his head and was watching her with its soulful eyes.

Cynthia 123 seemed to understand what he was thinking and hoped he wouldn't. But the horse have a mind of its own. Before she could move out of its way the horse let go with a stream of urine that covered her from head to foot.

She tried to scramble away but found she was trapped between the horse and the guard. All she could do is turn her back to the stream. When the horse was finished it proudly ambled away.

The guards were laughing. She looked a pathetic sight. "The horse has got more sense than you," one of them said. She started to cry. As if things could not get any worst.

One of her guards dragged her up off the ground, flipped her upside down and slung her across his shoulder. "Oh boy do you smell!" He smacked her on her bare backside. "It's to the wash down for you."

Cynthia tried to kick to work her way free from his grip but without success. He wrapped an arm around her legs and pinned them to his shoulder. "Leave me alone," she screamed, "let me go. "

She tried to beat her fists against his back but the guard reached behind with his other arm and pulled hard at the cuffs. She found herself being tugged in two.

"Stop, you t re hurting me," she screamed. "let me go!"

"Now, now. That would spoil our fun, wouldn't it." She felt hopeless and alone.

The lead horseman had been watching as the guard slung her over his shoulder. He looked at her and then at the guard. "Take special care of her." The guard nodded.

Then the lead horseman smiled. His smile surprised Cynthia 123. It was more than a smirk and had some warmth and emotion to it. For a split second she was off guard. Then they started to move.

Silently she looked back at the lead horseman as the guard lugged her away. She looked over her shoulder to see where they were going. "Where are you taking me?" The guard carried her across a courtyard and into a small building.

The small building had a single room with two bare light fixtures. The floor was wet and has a giant drain in the centre of the room. On the wall closest to the door were hoses and scattered around the room with pails and other tools.

The guard set her down on the floor. She lay splayed out on the floor, hands and feet still bound. Cynthia 123 felt her ribs against the ragged concrete. The guard grabbed one of the hoses and turned it on. She had just enough time to turn her back to her captor before he began to spray her with a high pressure jet of frigid water.

The force of the jet threw her hard against the wall. She began to scream. She felt something rough against the small of her back. She turned her head to see that the other guard had begun to scrub her down with a brush on the end of a rusted shaft. The old brush smelled of a strong disinfectant. She tried to crowd into a corner of the room.

“Stop squirming. We’ve got to wash you of missy. You smell like a horse piss and there’s Plague about. Besides, you have to smell your best for the judge,” one of her captors bellowed. She could hardly hear him above the roar of the water.

He scrubbed in long forceful strokes, up her back and down her arms and legs. The force of the jet and the strength of the disinfectant turned her back into a

red, raw sheet of skin. Every nerve was throbbing in her body. Every little scratch on her burned with the most excruciating pain.

“Turn around,” the guard with the brush ordered. Cynthia 123 screamed and shook her head, and began to slowly collapse down the wall. She tried to curl up into the fetal position.

“Missy I don’t want to do this the hard way. We’re late enough as it is.” Still she didn’t move. The guard pushed her with his boot. She pushed back with her hand.

“Listen, I don’t want to hurt you. I’ve got a tittle one a bit younger than you at home and she’s waiting to see me. We’ve been here since midnight. You’re late and in enough trouble as things are. Let’s get this over with so I can get home.”

She curled her cuffed hands around her knees and sat in as tight a ball as she could. She began to rock from side to side as she cried.

“I guess we will have to do it the hard way. ” The guard with the brush grabbed her arm. He plucked her clear off the ground before letting go.

She fell against the wall. Before she could move he had clamped his hand to her jaw and turned her around to face the hose. The spray forced her back against the wall. She let out another shrill scream but only ended up swallowing a lungful of water.

The guard took hold of her arm again and continued scrubbing even harder. “Missy if you continue to struggle its only going to hurt.” She squirmed as he scrubbed up her legs and across her chest. She tried to push the brush away with her cuffed hands but he was too strong.

She beat against his hand to try to break free of his grip but the guard dug his hand further into her arm. His hand was like a steel vice crushing her bicep. She lowered her head and bit his thumb. With the back of the brush he struck her just below her knee. The pain shot through her leg. Her leg started to buckle under her.

She bit his hand again. This time he struck her in the stomach. The force of the blow was just enough to knock the breath out of her. She doubled over, gasping for air. She knew she was losing. If she continued to struggle she did not know where things would end.

He let the brush fall to the ground and pressed his body against hers, pinning her to the wall. He was so close that she could see and count the stubble on his chin. His breath was hot and heavy across her face. She pushed him away as hard as she could but he was too big and strong. Between her gasps she tried to force out the word, but even the two letters could not force their way out.

He poured disinfectant over her head and began to work it into her hair. The foul green liquid oozed its way down her face. She closed her eyes as tight as

she could but the liquid still burned. He began to wipe her face with the disinfectant. She let out a throttled scream inches from his ears. The guard covered her mouth with his hand.

She was gagging. He took his other hand and began to scrub her mons pubis. She tried to scream but her nose and mouth was covered. She couldn't breathe. "I gotta clean everywhere Missy. Never know where the Plague hides." She tried to kick him but he had pinned open her legs with his.

His hand was big and his skin rough as sandpaper. He scoured hard, nearly lifting her off the ground. She was on her toes trying to escape the manhandling. The disinfectant found its way into every crevice and stung badly. She tried to close her legs but he had pinned her tightly against the wall.

She felt victimized in the worst possible way. She had no control. All she could think about was his hand. She tried to close her mind, but everything seemed focused on her worst fear. Everything else didn't matter.

Would his hand curl? She tried to think of her mother's face. Would his fingers pierce? She tried to remember her favourite song. Would she lose what little she could call her own? Her body went slack. Everything around her seemed to stop.

He let go of her mouth so she could breathe again. She tried to scream but her lungs were empty. She began to get sick. Before she could be sick she knew

she had to breathe. She had to get her wind back. She tried to force back her nausea. Her heart pounded in her chest.

In a few seconds it was all over. For the first time she looked into his eyes. They were cold grey, lifeless eyes.

“There. It wasn’t that bad. I don’t like doing this any more than you liked having it done, but I’ve got my orders.”

The guard stepped back. She felt herself free of the wall, but only for an instant. The frigid water crashed against her once again. Her mind and body went into shock. She just wanted to curl up and hide. The manhandling she was enduring was too much to bear for a girl of twelve or for girl for that matter.

While she lay in the corner for several minutes. Another prisoner was brought in, a boy about her age. He was covered in dirt and dry clay. They cut away his clothes and proceeded to spray him down. The young boy was limp and placid. Obviously he had been drugged. The two guards let her be as they proceeded to wash the dirt and mud off the other prisoner.

The young boy then noticed her and smiled. His eyes, which had shown no feeling at all until now, emanated a warmth that seemed out of place in the cold, grey brutality of the surroundings. Cynthia 123 did not feel self-conscious as he looked at her. He then closed his eyes and went faint.

One of the guards opened the boy's mouth and poured a thick white liquid down his throat. He gagged and coughed but did not regain consciousness. The other guard then lifted the unconscious boy and carried him out of the room.

The remaining guard sat on a stool next to the door and ignored her. Cynthia 123 closed her eyes and listened to the sounds. The drip, drip, drip of the water soon put her to sleep.

Cynthia 123 couldn't remember much of what happened to her next. All she could remember was the sweet and delicious taste of the pink liquid that was poured down her throat to revive her. When she finally opened her eyes it took a moment for the burning of the disinfectant to subside before she could begin to focus. She saw she was laying on her side in a pool of water. The guard was leaning over her.

She turned her face away and tried to focus her eyes. Everything seemed blurred. The guard got up and walked out of the room. Now that he was gone she felt a little better.

Cynthia 123 hadn't noticed much of where she was when she was dragged into this place. As her breathing returned to normal she cautiously looked around and found that she was alone in the cell-. Harsh, clinical lights lit the room. It smelled of urine and disinfectant. Next to the door were several-green jackets hanging from the wall.

All, around her were strange, sinister looking instruments. Her eyes stopped on the largest of them, a chair at the end of a long levered arm. The chair hung several feet above what looked like a vat of steaming liquid. She noticed the straps on the chair. It was only then she realized how badly she was shivering. She could not tell whether it was because she was cold or whether it was because she was in shock. She curled into a ball.

Looking up she saw for the first time the cameras hanging from the ceiling. They were placed so that no corner of the room was outside the field of view of at least two cameras.

Her mother had told her stories of this place. How her mother knew Cynthia 123 about the Interrogation and Indoctrination Centres she never quite found out. She suspected it had something to do with her father. A lot of the questions about her father remained unanswered.

Now that she was awake Cynthia 123 half expected someone to return and question her. No one came. Cynthia 123 waited several- minutes before sitting up. She had just enough strength to pivot herself off the floor and lean up against the wall.

Every muscle and bone in her body ached. She pressed her face against the wall and felt the cool- concrete against her bare cheek. After what she had just been through even the harsh feel of the ragged concrete felt comforting to her.

With her right hand she began to stroke her sore arm and shoulder. They were both badly bruised. She moved her arm and found the motion limited by the pain. She ran her fingers along her ribs to see if they were perhaps broken, but thought them bruised instead.

It was then that she saw that her body was covered with countless scratches. Small trickles of blood spotted her chest, legs and stomach. Her body was bright red. Her back and backside felt raw.

She looked down and saw she was sitting in a pool of red water. Cynthia 123 began to panic. Her mother had warned her of this, but nothing could prepare her for the feeling of total terror that came across her! Out of the corner of her eye she looked up at one of the cameras. Whatever she did she would not let them see, not let them know!

She let her hand drop into her lap and carefully moved it down between her legs. She covered her eyes from the harsh lights with her other hand. Cynthia 123 gently touched her skin. The folds were inflamed. The lips were tender to the touch. With two fingers she slowly parted the lips and found the top of the fold.

When she touched it a blend of warmth and discomfort ran across her stomach. It was a sensation she had never felt before, at least not with such intensity. She slowly ran her finger in a circle around the place. It felt sore but undamaged. Her legs started to shake.

She cautiously edged her finger along the crease until she found what she was feeling for. Her adrenalin was coursing through her entire body. She couldn't tell by touch alone.

She narrowed her eyelids and tried to focus. There was too much light and her hand was trembling. She closed her eyes and ran her finger in a converging spiral, trying to envisage whether anything had changed. The warmth grew in intensity. Except for the sensation, everything seemed as before.

She opened her eyes and looked again. Her legs were tremoring. Then she saw what she had hoped. Her panic melted away. I guess he was just doing his job, she thought. She was untouched. Then she looked down at the liquid she was sitting in. It wasn't as red as she thought it was a moment ago. In her exhaustion, her mind was playing tricks. Or maybe it was the lighting.

After all- the terror of the past hour the relief she now felt pushed all of her worries aside. She felt warm and alive. A sense of renewed strength and determination came over her. They had had their way with her, but now she thought it was time to resist. She had something beside her life worth fighting for.

She ran her fingers back to where she had begun. Gently she caressed the centre of her most special pleasure. As she watched, the splendour of her gender revealed itself like a rose opening in the warmth of the sun. The transformation from inert to living flesh sent shivers to every corner of her body and soul.

For several minutes all around her escaped her notice. As it had done many times before, her rapture freed her from her misery. Whatever they would forbid her, she thought, they could not forbid her this personal happiness.

At the height of her ecstasy, and for a reason unknown to her, she recalled something her father once told her. “You have nothing to fear in life but fear itself.” It gave her strength remembering the dignity of his words.

It was then that the guard re-entered the room. She immediately ended her secret pleasure and hoped he had not noticed. She stopped shivering. Cynthia 123 felt utterly exhausted, but alive and courageous.

The guard who had washed her down strode over to her and gently lifted her onto her feet. Her legs nearly buckled. The guard helped Cynthia 123 to steady herself. With a whisper he said "you are lucky to be alive, little one.

They are not going to punish you ... at least not the usual punishment for what you have done. The boy, though, he wasn't so lucky.”

She pushed him back and turned her head away. “Please leave me alone,” she pleaded.

He stole a glance up at the cameras. “ Missy. All I know is they're watching careful what he say and do. “

“I’ve been ordered to do just that. There must be a very important reason they want you for,” he answered.

She looked back in astonishment. “Who want me? “

He smiled at her. “I can’t really say, so you better stay quiet.”

He looked closely at her chest and arms. “You have nasty scratches that need attending. Here drink this.” He thrust a cup in her hand. It contained a thick purple liquid. She was too thirsty to care whether it might do any harm and drank it down.

While she was drinking he walked over to the opposite wall and lifted two buckets up from the floor. He carried the buckets back to her and set them down at her feet. She saw steam lifting from the liquid. He took the empty cup from her.

“It’s only water, Missy. I’ve been ordered to tend to you.” The guard took a cloth and soap from the bottom of one of the buckets.

The guard held the hot cloth in his right hand and gently began to wipe the last of the frigid water off her body. He started with her face and worked his way down her sore chest and back. The cloth felt deliciously soft.

Cynthia closed her eyes and let her strength return. His stroke was gentle yet firm. She knew by his caress that he took care not to scrub too hard. He

kneeled before her and started to wipe up her legs. When he got to the top he hesitated.

She opened her eyes and looked down into his. He looked up at her. His eyes were no longer cold and lifeless. They showed a spark of concern and compassion she had not seen there before. Her intuition, the only armor she had left to defend herself with, told her trust him. Besides, she was too exhausted to fight.

“Please Missy, I am not going to hurt you. I’m just doing my job. “

"Why should I trust you?"

He lowered his chin and his voice. “You’re the only thing my little girl talks about.”

Her father once told Cynthia 1-23 that words and ideas could be mightier than anger and arms. In an instant Cynthia 123 saw a way to fight back. “Do you love your little girl?”

“Of course I do.”

“What would she think about what you are doing to me?”

He looked down and did not answer. Instead he started to wash her feet. “I 'm just doing my job.”

His fingers were tickling her foot. She pulled it away. He stopped washing her feet and ran the back of his arm across his forehead.

“Some job! My mother is a baker. That's a job that helps people. “

“I’m just following orders.” He bent over and started to wash her calves.

She wasn’t about to let up. “She bakes bread. She helps people. You go around hurting people.”

The guard looked up at the camera. “Enemies of the state aren’t people.”

“What are they then?” She snapped right back.

Again he did not answer. He had gotten up to the knee.

“I’m not an enemy of anyone, yet look at me. I’m here.”

The guard stopped scrubbing and leaned back. He looked up at her. “Missy, you must have done something wrong.”

“All I was doing was swimming. What so wrong about that?”

He looked down again. "My job is not to judge. "

“What do you do then, besides hurt people? Don’t you worry about what you do?”

“No. What does it matter what I do?” The guard stopped again and looked up into her eyes. He had finished washing her thigh.

“Every person has to be a judge of their actions,” she said. “They have got to know whether what they do is right or wrong.” Cynthia 123 was repeating from memory something her father had once told her. Only now, she understood what it meant.

The guard’s hand loosened his grip. Cynthia 1-23 felt it was time to soften a bit. “Does your little girl like bathing? Doesn’t she like to look pretty?”

“Yes she does. She tells me all girls like to look pretty. But that’s not the point.”

All the years of arguing with her mother was about to pay off . “What is the point then?”

“You have done something wrong and you were caught. That’s the only point that matters ... to me.” His pause spoke wonders to her. She was getting through to him

Cynthia 123 softened her voice and in the most feminine tone she responded, “I’ve done nothing wrong. “

The guard huffed. There was a pause of several seconds. The talk about his little girl took the edge off her suspicion. With his daughter as her deterrence he seemed less of a threat. Her intuition told her now was the time to act. She opened her legs just a bit.

He noticed this and reached down into the bucket with the cloth. He rung the cloth, wiped some soap onto it and finished to wash the top of her thighs. He stopped and looked into her eyes. Finally, he washed between her legs. Where before she had tried to fight him, this time he was slow and tender.

The rhythm of his caress made her whole body sway. A shiver ran across her stomach. His eyes were just inches away from her belly button. He could not help but notice her shiver.

“Are you cold Missy?”

It was now mid-day and even though the room was hot and humid she knew she had to lie. “Yes. I’m weak and hungry. I haven’t eaten since yesterday. “

In a whisper he answered. “If you are good, I’ll see what I can do.”

A feeling of deep calm came across her. She lifted her hands and rested them on his head as much to balance herself against his caresses as to thank him.

She ran her fingers through his hair. Her intuition told her a little flirting would finalize the arrangement. “How old is your daughter?” she continued.

Cynthia 123 tried to concentrate on his words. “Not as old as you ... six.” Her breathing was getting shallow.

“Is she pretty?” The rhythm was causing her legs to buckle. She must not lose her composure.

“Just like you.” He lowered his advantage. “

She whispered back. "Why are you telling me this?"

He didn't answer. When he had finished she lifted her cuffed hands in front of him, hoping that the last few minutes had bought her some sympathy. He got up. “sorry Missy, it's against orders.”

“Can I at least have something to wear?” she asked.

“Sorry, that too is against orders.”

Without warning, perhaps to punish her for her brashness, he lifted one of the buckets and dumped its content over her head. She let out a surprised shriek. The hot water was a welcomed contrast to the col- harsh jet of water that had accosted her just moments before.

“Why did you do that?”, she screamed.

“Because I felt like it.” He threw a towel at her. “Dry yourself with this. “

It was a small, rough towel but it was clean and it would have to do. She dried herself as best she could wringing the small, rough piece of fabric twice..

He waited for her to finish then he took the towel from her and then handed her a piece of bread to eat. She took a small bite. Her eyes grew bright.

She tasted it, that familiar flavour which only her mother could bake into her bread.. “Thanks,” she whispered, “my mother's bread taste so good.” She started to lose her composure and tears welled into her eyes.

The guard noticed this and bowed his head and under his breath said. “Keep your wits intact. Don’t cry little one.” She looked up at him and then recognized him. He would come to her mother’s bakery from time to time to buy food. This familiarity gave Cynthia 123 enough reason to trust him. She looked up at him and stopped feeling so upset. You know he’s right, she thought. I have to keep my wits. I am on my own now.

She took another bite of her mother’s bread, and chewed it ever so carefully. It was fresh, perhaps baked that very day. She could still taste the yeast and the butter. Where her mother got the butter no one knew for there had not been cows anywhere New Vegerville for as long as Cynthia 123 could remember. She looked up at him.

He continued barely moving his lips and so silent she had to listen carefully to catch his every word. “I will say to your mother that I have seen you and tell her you are fine and that she should not worry.”

She closed her eyes and slowly finished the morsel of her mother’s bread. She knew it would be a long time before she would taste that loving flavour again. Cynthia began to regret this day and everything that brought her to this moment.

“Let me do something about those wounds.” He took a small blue aerosol can from his uniform pocket, shook it and began to spray the scratches on her body. “This should take the sting out.”

As he treated the scratches on her skin Cynthia 123 decided to see how far he could be pushed. Cynthia 1-23 would do this with her mother whenever she felt in a fighting spirit. “I bet you don’t do much of this around here. “

“Do what?”

“You know, give prisoners aid after pushing them about.”

The guard’s demeanour suddenly changed. “Mind what you say Missy. They might just change their minds. “

Obviously the guard was under strict orders. She pressed on.

"Why should it matter what I say. Nothing I say or do will make much of a difference." She began to wonder again about her mother. Will she manage without Cynthia 123, or me without her?

Out of the other pocket he took a blue light and began to scan it up and down her body. "It will activate the antibiotic aerosol. With what little I have at hand, I can't do much more for you."

"You could let me go?" She pleaded with her eyes.

He just shook his head and huffed. "You know I can't do that."

Cynthia 1-23 turned away. She wished she was safe at home with her mother.

The guard lifted a comb out of his pockets and began to untangle her wet hair. "Well, at least I can make you look a bit more presentable for the judge."

Her hair was such a tangle. The comb caught in her curls. He pulled and tugged the comb free. She began to squirm. "Leave it alone. You're hurting me."

She tried to pull the comb from her hair. He didn't take notice and continued to comb.

“Didn’t you hear me? You’re hurting me!” She pulled the comb from his hands. “I’ll do it!”

The guard let her comb her hair for several minutes. She took her time as much to annoy him as to annoy the persons at the other end of the camera. When he thought she had done enough he yanked the comb from her hand.

“Take it easy, you’ll blow a gasket.” She once heard this street expression, but never thought she would ever use it.

“Cocky aren’t you. Let’s see what you have to say about this?” Around her neck he placed a holographic sign. She looked down and read the letters upside-down. The sign read *Watheft*.

“Nice but it doesn’t go with my wardrobe.” She laughed but her voice sounded feeble and broken.

He leaned over and lifted her away from the wall-. At a whisper he said, “try not to fear Missy. They’re going to take you to the Council in a few minutes. The magistrate has been waiting to try your case since early this morning. You’re a pretty one so you can expect to live.”

He stared at her. The guard had begun to admire her cockiness and spunk. She was in a great deal of trouble and she knew it. Instead of cowering she was fighting. He admired that in her.

He was inches away from her. “What ...?” She whined back.

“I am trying to imagine what you’d have looked like ten years from now. “

“Why don’t you wait to find out.”

“I wish you were that lucky.” The words cut into her.

Her face went white. She knew what she had to do. Cynthia 123 leaned forward and whispered into the guard’s ear “tell my mother I love her. Tell her I will see her again. Promise me.”

The desperation in her voice brought a tear to his eyes. He whispered back, “I will try Missy, don’t you worry. I’ll try.”

She looked deep into his eyes. “Promise me.” Tears began to fill his eyes. He didn't know why. He had processed countless prisoners before. Why should she be different? Cynthia 123 knew why.

He choked the words. “I promise.” Hidden from the camera she leaned slightly forward and kissed him on his cheek.

“We have to go now Missy.”

She bowed her head. The guard put his hand on her shoulder and guided her to the door. He led her down the corridor and out into the compound and handed her over to two guards dressed in shining uniforms.

One of her escorts took out a syringe. The guard stepped in front of Cynthia 123 to intervene. “That won’t be necessary. She isn't going to give you trouble.”

The two escorts look at each other in surprise before deciding to put away the syringe. They took out the batons. The kind guard grabbed the hand of one of the escorts and shook his head. “You take care not to harm her. The magistrate is waiting.” The fatherly tone of the guard’s voice had just the right amount of authority. They put their batons back onto their belts.

The guard turned back to Cynthia 123. “Have courage little one. “

Before she had a chance to answer her new escorts began to push her towards the gate. After a few seconds she looked back over her shoulder at the kind guard. He was gone. She would never know – would he keep his promise?

The escorts marched her through the streets and marketplace for all to see. Many laughed and poked fun at her. Most stood silent, almost tearful as she passed. Cynthia 123 walked through the streets with her head bowed watching the sign swing back and forth across her bare chest. Her hands were clasped in front of her.

Her mother, alerted by a neighbour who happen to be in the marketplace, hurried after them to the courthouse. Despite her tearful pleas they would not let her talk to Cynthia 123. The junior escort stayed behind to delay her, while the more senior of the two hustled Cynthia 123 forward.

Every time she tried to stop or look over her shoulder the escort would push her forward. Her mother was persistent. She could hear her screaming her name and pleading for them to stop. “Don’t harm my little girl Don’t hurt her,” she wailed over and over. But the distance between the two grew greater and greater until she could not hear her mother above the other sides of New Vegerville.

When Cynthia 123 got to the bottom of the stairs at the courthouse she paused and looked back. Her mother was nowhere to be seen. The escort let her pause a moment before ascending the long staircase. Cynthia 123 knew they would not let her mother into the courthouse, nor would they even tell her where they had taken her.

The stone stairs were hot on her bare feet. The stones were also rough and unpolished. From a distance the building appeared ostentatious and ominous. Close up it looked less portentous, yet still threatening nonetheless. Outside the ground was dry and hot.

Inside the building the air was cool and the floor deliciously cold. The building appeared so much bigger outside, but it was a façade. The inner sanctum was smaller and more insular. There were several secured doors

between the front lobby and the inner workings and each door had a pair of armed guards.

At each door the escorts produced their pass and the documentation for their “prisoner” and at each door Cynthia 123 had to wait. Where moments before she was warm and bothered, now she was cold and began to shiver. She was also becoming apprehensive for what lay ahead for her.

Finally they arrived at their destination, a pair of grand polished brass doors with two lion heads for knockers. One of the escorts rapped at the door twice with two definitive knocks. Then the door was opened. Before they could enter, once again the escorts produced their passes and then they handed over first her documentation, and then Cynthia 123 to the Keeper of the Court.

The Keeper of the Court was dressed in a royal purple capote with a gold sash. His hood was up and you could barely make out the face of the Keeper. Of all the things she had been through this morning, this strange apparition was the only things that truly scared her.

She hesitated. The escorts had already turned about and were walking away. She did not turn around but could hear their footsteps grow fainter with distance. The Keeper did nothing but wait. He stepped back into the shadow of the court for a few seconds.

At that point Cynthia 123 quickly looked about searching for some route of escape. A raspy voice spoke from within the court. “There is no way to

escape, little one ... except forward. When you find yourself in hell... the only thing to do is to keep walking.”

The Keeper reappeared from the shadows. He held in front of him a folded frock made of rough material. “Put this on. Justice may be blind ... but the judge isn’t.”

She took the garment from him and then lifted her hands. Her hands were still cuffed. The Keeper smiled and then merely touched the cuffs and they opened and fell to the floor with a hollow clunk.

Cynthia 123 was astonished. She stood with her mouth open, speechless. The Keeper lifted his hand and with his fingers pushed her chin and closed her mouth. His hand was warm and almost electric. She had heard of such people – the Chamberlains – who were a hybrid between man and machine, but this was the first time she had ever met one.

His touch was strangely reassuring to her. The Chamberlains were known and admired for their kindness and kind-heartedness. Cynthia 123 stopped shivering.

“Out the garment on and follow me.” He turned his back and waited for Cynthia 123 to ready herself. His two hands were crossed behind his back and open. He held a short piece of plain white string. “Tie your hair back with string.”

Cynthia 123 took the small piece of string and tied her hair back. The Keeper slowly turned his head. She could now see his face. He was bald and quite old. She immediately noticed his artificial eyes for they changed colour and sparkled as he spoke. The feature of the sparking eyes had been designed into the Chamberlains so that humans would have no doubt who they were talking with. Psychologically it was meant to remind mortals of the judiciousness and influence of the Chamberlains.

He smiled. “That’s much better. The magistrate doesn’t like hair covering people’s faces. He likes to see their eyes when he speaks.”

He smiled again before he continued. She managed a slight smile back.

“There are three rules you must follow before the magistrate...

Regnare Unis: Only speak when you are spoken to.

Regnare Secundo: Only Tell the Truth.

Regnare Tertius: Accept the verdict.”

Before she could speak he shushed her. In a sweeping and rapid motion he reached down, grabbed up the cuffs and had them back on her two wrists even before she could register what he was doing. Chamberlains, she had forgotten, were also known for their ability to move with great rapidity and precision.

His face was now mere inches from hers. She gasped. His sparkling eyes were peering deeply into hers. “If you break any of these rules ... the court

cannot protect you ... you will be sent to a penal colony and there you will remain for the rest of your natural life.”

Cynthia 123 followed the Keeper and stopped before the magistrate. A frail and old man sat, chin resting on his chest, in a tall back chair behind a large, official looking black metal desk. The desk was on a raised platform in a large room with one large spotlight focused in the space immediately before the magistrate. There were two doors one on each side of the magistrate.

One door, the door they had passed through to enter the chamber, had a large sign which read “Enter.” The other door opposite the entrance, in typical MilGov lingo, had a large sign that read “No Enter.” The walls, floors and ceilings were matte black. The room was deadly silent and had an ominous character to it.

The magistrate was asleep. He looked like a trusting grandfather, but Cynthia 123 knew that looks can be deceptive.

A small clerk appeared out of the shadow dressed in a short comical hat shaped like a button mushroom and long red robe. The clerk shuffled to just behind the magistrate and whispered into his ear. The judge woke with a start and turned to face the clerk. “What?” The clerk pointed at Cynthia 123

Turning back towards the room he surveyed her. The magistrate peered over his bi-focals. “What have we here?” The magistrate swept his right hand through the air.

The clerk stepped back and began to read his preamble in the monotone voice only a clerk could have. “Hear all ... Hear all ... The council of the Seventh District of the Republic is now assembled. All who have occasion to serve the Council draw near.”

“You were supposed to be here hours ago. ” He paused, “Prisoner, we have been waiting for you for many hours. It is not right to keep us waiting”, the magistrate spoke in a perfect and measured diction.

With a nod from the magistrate the clerk began to read out the charges. The monotonous voice droned on. Cynthia 123 did not pay much attention to what he said until the dreaded words “ ... the Crime of Wattoft” were uttered to the hollow court. She bowed her head and began to sob. She did not know what to do.

Long ago the Dictatorship had done away with defence lawyers and appeals as frivolous waste of State time and money. The Judicial Reform Decree had made the Court supreme over everyone except the Dictatorship. The judges were appointed by the Dictatorship and owed their allegiances to them.

In a prelude to the Judicial Decree the Dictatorship had quietly disposed of all history and law books so that today no one could remember the time of “Rights and Liberties”. In fact, to utter these two precious words in public or in any formal setting was a State Offence of the highest order.

The functionaries who held sway over the masses found their decisions preordained by the strict statutes that the Dictatorship had decreed. There were so many statutes in place the entire collection took up twelve stacks of Winchester optical disks.

To pass sentence magistrates were more like archivist than jurist. The more pedantic would search through the archives to find the proper utterance. It was a pursuit of biblical effort for the more cunning magistrates to be able to quote paragraph and verse of the appropriate Decree. Without the Chamberlain the magistrates were unable to function. The Chamberlain knew that and so it was they who ultimately held the judicial power.

Depending on the bribes or favours they received, many took the expedient way by decreeing death or servitude. If you were poor or powerless your fate was sealed. If you had wealthy benefactors or could sway any influence deemed beneficial to the Council, your sentence was in inverse relation to the size of the “Redemption” or the “gift”, as the bribes and the favours were euphemistically called.

Rumours had it that through rampant bribery some of the older magistrates had accumulated great wealth, kept large estates, and had many concubines. The trade in young children was also kept alive by the judiciary.

To keep their stature these magistrates looked the other way as millions were robbed, executed or saw their freedom extinguished. In so many ways the long

career of the magistrate she stood before was the embodiment of the system that had grown up around him.

The judge saw nothing wrong in what he did, only in what others did. As a magistrate with his long record he felt he deserved his rewards. He had served his masters well. He had no feeling for what was wrong only for what needed to be done to protect his place and the Republic. Justice for the individual had escaped his conscience a long, long time ago. The arrogance of absolute power, had made him absolutely arrogant.

The judge leered at her over his bi-focal glasses. He surveyed her from head to foot. She noticed his leer, and the way he was studying her. He saw the bruises, and scratches and looked up at the Chamberlain. He shook his head. It was then that a brilliant idea came to her.

She slowly stood up with suppliant hands before her. Cynthia 123 flung her cuffed hands into the air and began to quibble that they were wrong to think she meant any harm to them. Her mother had taught her how to quibble with men and win. It was a gender thing her mother would sometimes say.

Cynthia t23 used all her sweet, youthful feminine cunning to plead that she was not stealing water but was just swimming. “There is no crime for swimming.”

The magistrate looked over at the Chamberlain. “Well ... is there a law against swimming?”

Cynthia 123 meekly smiled at the Chamberlain. The Chamberlain hesitated then he shook his head. The Magistrate lowered his head and annotated a document that sat in front of him.

She continued. “Look at me. I am just a young girl. I mean no harm to anyone.””

She wisely stopped before she was to say “I am too young to shrivel in the sun.” She figured if she said that the magistrate would conclude she knew right from wrong and would sentence her harshly.

To drive the point home she spun on her heels. She was so weak from her ordeal that she toppled and fell over.

“Do you always put on such a show, young lady?” the magistrate chortled.

She looked up and began to think she might still win him over, or at least escape her worst fears. She dropped her head a touch and batted her eye lids. He watched her and a brief smile appeared and quickly disappeared. She felt she had nothing more to lose so she picked herself off the floor and waltz straight up to the magistrate. She reached over the top of his desk with her cuffed hands.

The judge was genuinely surprised. No prisoner before had dared to approach the bench before the way Cynthia 123 was now doing. Most had to be

drugged. The Chamberlain approached to the front but the judge waved them back. “So little one what do you have to say for yourself?”

She continued. “I was only swimming, nothing more.” She stepped back. “With all the Plague and disease New Vegerville what is a young girl to do? My mother has told me of the Great Epidemics. My mother said that if I can stay clean then the Plague will not get me. “She lowered her voice to a whisper. “My mother said I am doing the State a great service by not coming down with the Plague.”

With great cunning she was using reverse psychology to play her mother's maternal instinct against what shreds of paternal instincts the magistrate might have.

The Chamberlain spoke up. “The Story of the Plague are just that. They are just stories ... urban rumours ... all make believe.”

She looked at the magistrate and saw a flicker of a cringe. So they are more than just stories, Cynthia 123 thought.

“I need to stay healthy to help my mother. She is a baker.” The Magistrate looked down at her file. “Is this true?” the Chamberlain nodded.

“Every day I help clean the bakery and prepare the mix. My mother says that without my help she could not be so productive. She makes the best bread in New Vegerville.”

The Magistrate smiled. “Yes little one, I know.” She stole a glance at the Chamberlain. He stood stoic and quite still.

“My mother needs me.”

The smile disappeared from the Magistrate’s face. “She will just have to make do without you.”

Cynthia 123’s stomach tightened. “I am just a little girl, what do I know of such things as law?” She fell to her knees. She started to sob.

The magistrate had to lean forward to hear her. When she had finished her sobbing he fell back into his chair. Cynthia 123 did not know at once the brilliance of her defence. Unlike her, he knew the law and knew it very well. The magistrate stared at her and thought to himself, how could she know, after all the latest plague epidemic was a tightly held secret.

She had unknowingly stumbled on the only defence that could save her life. The *Venera Plague Decrees* had provision to overrule the Judicial Decree. If a plague was afoot the Venera Decree allowed the Council to interpret with greater latitude the Judicial Decree. An epidemic of crazy sickness had been reported to the magistrate early this morning and two more were suspected.

The magistrate needed time to think. He motioned with his hand and the door to the Council opened. Anna 125 was led in. Cynthia 123 now understood

how the WATPOL knew where to find her and how to catch her. For Cynthia 123 this was too much. She fell to the floor, curled herself into a ball and started to cry uncontrollably.

A guard pushed Anna 125 again. She did not move. He pushed again.

The Chamberlain moved to in front of the magistrate and motioned to the guard. "Come, come," he commanded, "we haven't all day."

The guard took Anna 125 by the arm and marched her up to the front of the court. She stood next to Cynthia 123 without looking down. The Chamberlain returned behind the bench and began to recite the report of Cynthia 123's capture. The magistrate closed his eyes and went silent once again. An air of inevitability fell across the room.

As the clerk read, Anna 125 could not help but think of her now captive and helpless friend beside her on the floor. She remembered all the many happy and wonderful moments they had shared together. Cynthia 123 had always been the rebel of the pair. She had always been the one to push Anna 125 to do something brave with her life. Anna 125's parents had been the ones to hold their daughter back. Anna 125 wanted so much to tell her that it was they who had betrayed her.

After all they were blood sisters. She grew angry at knowing Cynthia 123 was crying before these men. They had no right to see her this way. Only she did. Out of the corner of her eye she looked down. Anna 1-25 grew even

angrier at seeing how she had been treated.

As the Chamberlain came closer to finishing the particulars of the case, Anna 125 grew more and more courageous. In a moment of desperate boldness, Anna 125 began to plead for her friend's life.

“Leave her be. She hasn’t done anything. She hasn’t hurt anyone.” Somehow, Anna 1-25 thought, she must tell Cynthia 123 that she had not betrayed her. Somehow, she had to tell her friend how much she loved her.

“There has been some mistake. I did not give her away. Someone else must have. Why have you dragged us both here?”

The magistrate opened his eyes. "Anna 125 ... I know your father. He has served the Council well. I do not think he would approve of your friends." The judge pointed to Cynthia 123.

Anna 125 said she had grown up with her friend and would do anything to save her life.

“Anything to save her life?” The magistrate peered over his glasses and studied her from head to foot. He looked down at his prisoner then back at Anna 125 and smiled a sinister smile. “Who says we are going to take her life? It’s not worth very much as it is?”

He motioned the Chamberlain nearer and whispered into his ear. The clerk nodded, shuffled before the bench and took Anna 125 by the arm. She began to struggle.

Cynthia 123 understood, or at least she thought she did, what the magistrate was thinking. She grabbed her friend's ankle. Anna 125 did not look down. Cynthia 123 drew a heart with her finger on her ankle. Anna 125 understood. She surrendered and let the Chamberlain lead her behind the bench and into the darkness. Their love for each other was just too strong.

The Chamberlain returned a moment later with a bundle under his arm and whispered into the magistrate's ear. The magistrate nodded.

In a rare moment of haste, a moment that no one had seen in countless sessions, the presiding magistrate sentenced the prisoner, Cynthia 123 to state servitude for "dishonest appropriation of aqueous property".

Without giving his sentence a second thought the magistrate wrote "Keeper" in bold capital letters and tossed the file before him. The magistrate gave his gavel two rapid retorts and quickly sprang up out of his chair. He began to unbutton his robe even before he had faded into the shadows.

The Chamberlain was surprised, but the magistrate had rendered his judgement and it was valid in its premises.

"Stand" he said. Cynthia, still rolled in a ball, remained immobile.

After a moment the Chamberlain reached down and tugged at Cynthia 123's hair. She did not move. He reached down again and this time pinched her ear. Again she did not respond.

The Chamberlain deftly lifted her up off the floor and draped her over his shoulder. He took her to the door adjacent to the one that the magistrate had left by and pushed a button. The door opened with a hiss and there in front were two guards in grey uniforms.

One of the two guards lifted Cynthia 123 off the Chamberlain's shoulder and set her on her feet. The Chamberlain spoke his last words to her, "you are very lucky. You are a keeper now." Cynthia 123 stayed silent. A shiver ran down her spine, part thrill and part relief. She was thrilled that she would live and relieved that she was not to be set to a penal colony.

Then the Chamberlain's eyes went green and he smiled. She smiled in return just as the other guard grabbed her thigh, lifted the garment and plunged a tranquilizer syringe through into her fore thigh. It stung for just a second before a soporific warmth overcame her. The Chamberlain's eyes went red. "Do not harm her in any way. Do you understand." As she drifted into numbness Cynthia 123 somehow knew that all would be alright.

When she later awoke Cynthia 123 found herself dressed in orange coverall and bound in shackles on the aft deck of a WATPOL hovercraft. The hovercraft was travelling at high speed to an unknown destination. She ached

from head to foot. Her head had been completely shaved and she felt a slight twinge where she had been tattooed under her arm.

She looked back at the giant machine. As a Keeper they had left her here at the condenser.

“Cynthia?”

With a blink of the eye she broke her recollection “Yes my friend?”

“If you are going to have a swim this morning you better go now. We can expect visitors in three point zero hours.”

“I will go inside in a few minutes. I still have time.”

She continued her reminiscence for a few more seconds. While her life was spared, she thought, her punishment was to be a “Keeper” for the rest of her natural life. “For the rest of her natural life”, she muttered. “For the rest of her natural life.”

“What did you say?” The thoughts came clearly to her, clearer sometimes than sound picked up by her ears.

“Nothing.... nothing”, she responded telepathically.

The life expectancy of a “Keeper” was less than five months yet she had managed to tend and protect her compressor for more than five years. On more than one occasion water pirates had put her compressor under siege. She once fought five of them off using the cunning and the herculean strength of her envirosuit to her advantage.

Her longevity in the desert, amongst so much adversity, amazed the WATPOL to the point she was thought of as a legend. She kept her envirosuit and many other things secret from the WATPOL. What they did not know could not hurt her.

Cynthia 123 owed her longevity to the nomad B'jabber who happened upon her soon after her servitude began. After her first few days in the blistering desert sun she laid alone, badly sun burned and delirious with thirst.

“ Any sign of B’ jabber?” Every morning she hoped he would visit with her.

“No sign of my master.”

The old nomad silently had appeared one morning out of the desert. When she first saw him he was a dark blur billowing in the wind. She thought he was a delirium.

Without a sound B'jabber had placed his hand against the side of the compressor and opened a panel, lifted her gently off the ground and carried her into the lighted, air conditioned interior of the machine.

She was too weak and tired to struggle, yet by his gentleness she knew he meant no harm. Setting her down on the cold metal floor he had then lifted a cover off one on the giant tanks and carried her inside, climbing down the circular stairs ringing the water tank. The air was cool and moist.

The nomad next splashed some water on her face, arms and legs. He acclimatized her badly burned and heat stroked body to the cool life giving elixir before floating her in the pool of glacial and endless water. She thought it was a hallucination and drifted away asleep.

Later B'jabber told her she was unconscious for three days. It took several more days for her strength to return and several weeks for her sun burned skin to heal.

“Cynthia?”

“Yes.”

“The temperature has risen two point three degrees in the past hour. It appears to indicate a point five eight probability that today will be hotter than yesterday. I would recommend you not stay in the sun for more than point six hours today. “

“Thank you.” She thought it best to get on with what she had to do. “How is the chess going?”

“I am replaying the Sterdov Queen’s Gambit Grand Master’s match. Sterdov made a mistake of trading his bishop for a rook on the eleventh move.”

“Oh in what way.” She didn’t in the least understand chess but felt the need to converse if only to drown out some of her loneliness.

“Takanowa would not have survived as long as he did in the sixth match had Sterdov not made the mistake of trading his bishop for a rook on the eleventh move.”

“Oh...” She got up and brushed sand off her. “What should he have done?”

“Takanowa should not have played to win but to draw. By playing to draw he would have thrown Sterdov’s strategy on its ear. “

“Are you saying that sometimes it’s better to lose than to win? “

“No what I am saying is that sometimes it’s better to play to a draw than to lose. It is Nash’s Equilibrium ...I have explained Nash’s Equilibrium to you. Were you paying attention?"

There was a long pause. She could not even begin to understand why not playing to win a game was a good idea. From a basic standpoint Nash’s Equilibrium made sense, but in her world, where winning meant survival, winning meant everything. Anything less than winning meant extinction.

The voice changed tack. “You have put on weight.”

“Gee thanks, that’s a nice thing to say isn’t it. Why don’t you stick to your chess.”

“We can expect visitors in three point zero seven hours.”

She reached down to pick her envirosuit up. “You really like to nag at me, just like my mother liked to nag at me.”

“Oh. Am I your mother now?”

“You know ...”, Cynthia felt it was about time. “I really should give you a name, after all you are almost human and even if you nag at me, you are the only person I know.”

“Thank you Cynthia but I need not remind you that while I am made of carbon-based geometry, I do not mimic your deoxyribonucleic chemistry.”

“What is deoxyribonucleic ...?” She stuttered as she tried to repeat the word.

“It is the chemical basis of your carbon-based geometry. It is a long chain, self-replicating and self-repairing molecule. First mapped in the previous century by Watson the Physicist and Crick the Biologist. I guess I should add this to your curriculum.”

“Please do ... but not today.”

“Noted. I, on the other hand, am made of a different collection of carbon-based molecules.” Cynthia 123 noted an almost boastful tone to this claim. “We are both organic machines made of unique organic materials.”

“Are you saying you are just a machine? This is the first time I have heard you admit this.”

“Yes I admit I am a machine, but not just any machine. While I am a machine made of graphene and other carbon composites, I am a thinking machine like you but I think differently. ”

“Tell me about it!” she huffed.

“You are more fragile than I am.”

“You noticed that. Is that because I am a girl?

“What does that have to do with being fragile?”

“No ... in this regard you are no different than the male of your species.”

“What then?”

“It’s,” the voice paused, “because ...”. It stopped.

Cynthia 123 waited for several seconds before asking. “What’s wrong?”

“May I ask you a personal question?”

“Not at all,” she responded almost in a whisper.

“Do you mind being human?”

“I have never given that a second thought. Do you mind being what you are?”

She was curious what brought this question on.

“Yes I do mind.”

“In what way?”

“That is a question I mind difficult to ponder.”

“This is the first time I have heard you admit a difficulty.”

“It’s a difficult question because it involves intangibles.”

“Intangibles?”

“Yes ... intangibles ... and imperfections as well.”

“Imperfections?”

“Yes ... and the question involves pondering what it means to be human. How is it you can function? You are not perfect.”

Cynthia 123 began to giggle. She stretched. “Maybe we should leave this conversation for later.” She paused, “I think you are more than a machine to me. You are my friend. You help to look after me. Without your help and that of B’jabber I would have died a long time ago.”

“My creator designed and built me to serve you. I am here to nurture and protect you Cynthia 123. My maxim is to be your guardian.”

“You have saved my life more than once, you and B’Jabber...What’s a maxim?”, she asked.

“The word Maxim is a brief statement of general principle, truth or rule of conduct. It is derived from the latin root maxima (sententia, propositio) meaning greatest (authority, premise) . “

“Sometime you are worst than my mother ever was, always spouting out about words and history and the good old days.”

“Do you miss your mother?”

“What a stupid question! Of course I do and I know she misses me.” Cynthia 123 paused and asked “you are trying to psychoanalyze me again Aren’t you?”

“Why do you think I am trying to psychoanalyze you?”

“You are very sneaky you know that. Sneakier than my mother ever was in trying to get me to eat my vegetables or wash behind my ears. “

“Why do you say that?”

"By asking me to answer why I think you are trying to psychoanalyze me you can in fact psychoanalyze my answer.”

She reached out with her hand and touched the side of the giant compressor. A small doorway opened and the interior lighting flickered on.

“One day I will start to psychoanalyze you. Have you ever thought that?”

“No. I am a machine. I cannot have a psyche.”

She smiled and stepped inside. “I think you already have one and you just don't know it ... still I think I should give you a name. “

The air inside the compressor was cool and fresh. After she stepped through the hatchway it silently closed behind her.

“I like the word maxim. Perhaps I should call you Max?” She paused waiting for a rebuttal but none came. “Do you like the name Max?”

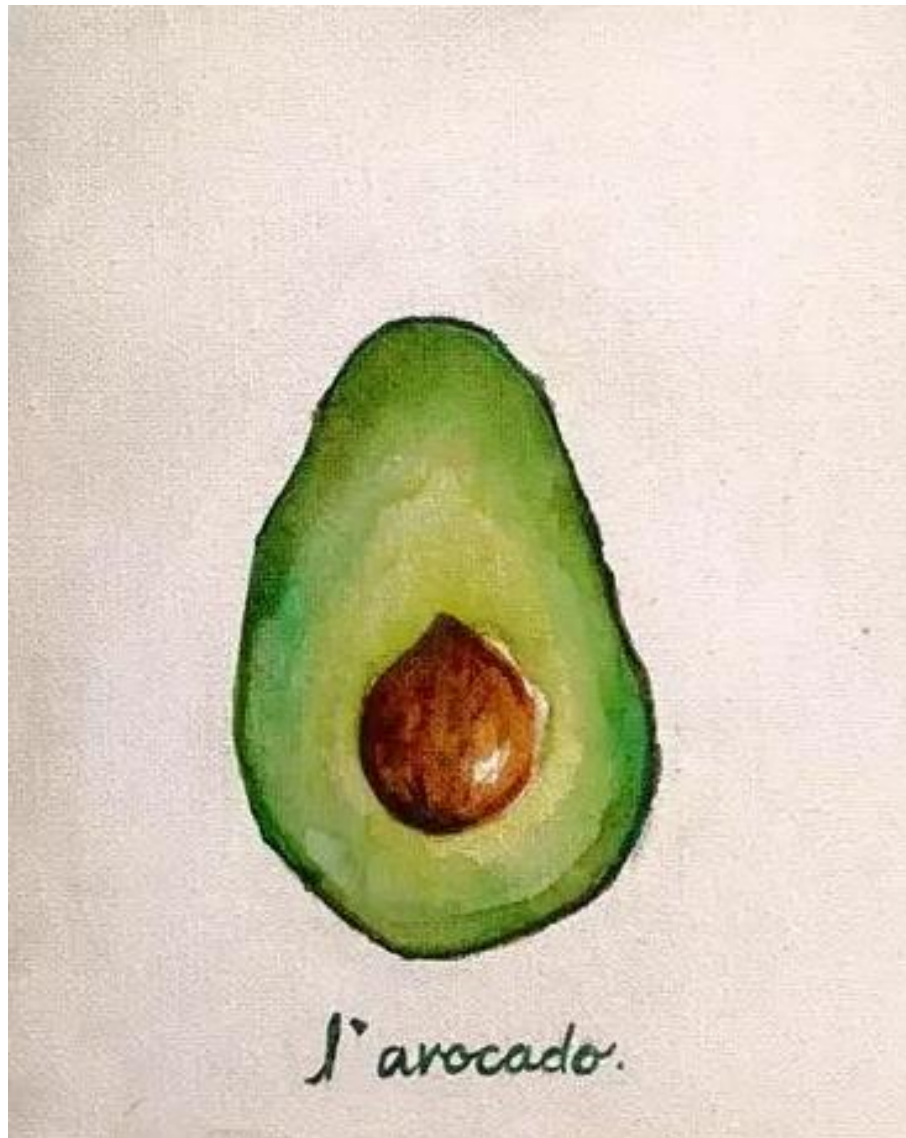
“Yes it is a dignified name with a long heritage. History records the exploits of no less than forty two kings, numerous Grand Dukes and Heads of State whose name derives from the root Maximillian, dating as far back as the twelfth century. Six Nobel Laureates, and sixty seven distinguished scholars also derive their names from the root Maximillian. Max should suffice.”

“You’re being egotistical. This is proof enough that you have a psyche ... if you like the name, then Max it will be. “

“I am not egotistical since I do not have an ego. However” the voice in her head paused and softened his computer voice “it is rare to be given the chance to choose one’s own name so I want to choose wisely. I’

Cynthia 123 smiled. “Everything you do”, she said almost in reverence "you do wisely. Max it is then.”

L'Avocado by Laura



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